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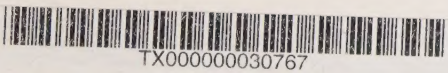

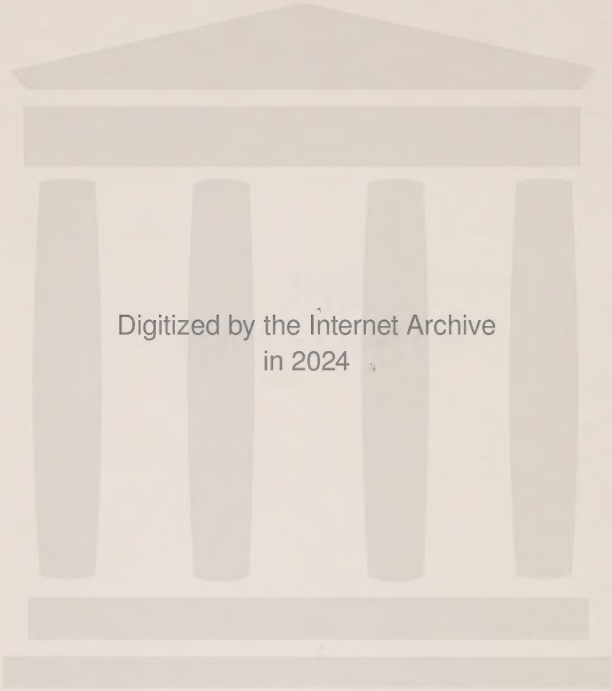
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TENDENCIES OF MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA

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BY
A. E. MORGAN

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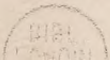

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PREFACE

In the nature of the case a book on contemporary writers cannot be completely up-to-date. This is no exception. Whilst this book was in the press authors dealt with in the text have brought out new plays, and plays already published have been produced. Some reference to these new plays will be found in footnotes, and they have been given a place in the appended List of Plays.

My most grateful acknowledgement of help is due and offered to Principal H. J. W. Hetherington for his kindness in reading my manuscript and for assistance in connection with publication during my absence from England. I owe much to his valuable criticism, but I alone am responsible for all shortcomings. I would also thank Mr. I. Levine for revising proofs.

I desire also to record my thanks to those authors who have kindly given permission for quotation from their works and to their respective publishers. These latter are Messrs. Samuel French for the plays of Grundy, Hankin's *The Charity that Began At Home* and Houghton's *The Younger Generation*; Mr. William Heinemann for Mr. Masefield's *Melloney Holtspur*; Mr. Grant Richards for Mr. Masefield's *Tragedy of Nan*; Mr. Martin Secker for Hankin's *The Last of the De Mullins*; Messrs. Sidgwick and Jackson for the plays of Miss Baker, Mr. Barker, Mr. Drinkwater and Miss Sowerby, for Houghton's *Hindle Wakes*, and Mr. Masefield's *Pompey the Great*.

A. E. M.

University College,
Exeter, *November*, 1923.

CHAPTER I

OF MODERN DRAMA

This book is not designed as a complete history of modern English drama, chiefly for the reason that it deals largely with the work of dramatists who are still living and writing. It must be left to a future writer to see their work in the true perspective which only time will give and to appraise it with that impartiality which it is well-nigh impossible to assume towards one's contemporaries. The main purpose of the book is not even to study modern English drama merely on the ground of intrinsic merit, though that is an aspect of the question which the most superficial treatment will necessarily include. The aim is rather to attempt to show the direction in which drama has moved during the past fifty years; and seeing to how great an extent it has been a drama of ideas, it will be no small part of the work to study the outlook on life which is expressed and interpreted by the dramatists of the period. The degree of stress laid on one aspect or the other will vary with different dramatists. It is clear that the discussion of Mr. Shaw's work will turn very largely on his philosophy; whereas with a dramatist like Synge the philosophical element calls proportionately for less substantial treatment, and the æsthetic for more.

In view of the vast dramatic output of the past half century some process of selection has been necessary. In making the selection I have kept in mind the principles already enunciated. The result is that some writers who would rightly claim a place in a general history of drama have

been omitted if they do not contribute to or reflect the tendency of dramatic development. This is the explanation, which perhaps will not be accepted as an excuse, for the omission of many names which the reader may look for in vain.

In speaking of modern drama I am deliberately giving a qualitative rather than a chronological meaning to the word modern. Modern dramas were written more than thirty years ago, in the sense that they are akin to the drama characteristic of to-day. Contrariwise, Victorian plays are still being composed. Mr. H. A. Jones's *Saints and Sinners*, although produced in 1884, is in many respects newer both in spirit and in form than some plays which are appearing to-day.

If the word ' modern ' is ambiguous the word ' drama ' is even more difficult to define. Like all such words, like the word ' poetry ', for example, it is incapable of rigid definition and moreover it needs no definition. That is not to say that we should not discuss its nature ; so long as it is realized that to talk about a vague thing is not to define it. In any consideration of English drama the historian is at once struck by the fact that until quite recently it has been a theme which has rarely been treated seriously. There have been annals of the stage, biographies of players, but, with the exception of the romantic criticism of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, English drama has not until recently been regarded as worthy of treatment as a subject of literary history. The very good reason for this was that for a large part of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the drama was, perhaps justly, in very low repute. It was simply a theatrical entertainment and nothing more. If art is regarded merely as a means of relaxation, as a delicious escape from life, it will lose touch with reality. That is precisely what did happen.

Certainly one of the ends of art is to assist the spirit to transcend the limitations of the ordinary circumstances of living. By its means the emotions and the unexpressed yearnings of the human heart are realized in the world of

imagination. In the realm of fancy we are all that we would but cannot be, and it is an important function of art to transport us to that land of heart's desire. Drama, not less than other forms of art, has its share in this liberating and purifying process.

But drama serves another and higher end. Its greatest function, like that of all art, is to assist us to penetrate into and to interpret life rather than to escape from life. It is a picture of reality seen through the emotional and imaginative vision of the artist. As Mr. Padraic Colum, the Irish dramatist, has put it: "We are in a studio and painted canvasses are lying about. The artist puts a frame before one of the canvasses and at once the picture is a mark for our attention." [1] It is the function of the dramatist to bring before our mental and imaginative vision the human material that life provides in abundance. He is a man "endowed with more lively sensibility" than ordinary men, as Wordsworth said of the poet. His more discriminating and more perceptive eye discerns what we miss in life, and his creative imagination enables him to fashion a work of art which embodies what he has seen in a form in which even we, with our dull vision, can comprehend and appreciate it. "A beggar woman crouched on the street begs an alms from us. We hardly notice her face, her attitude or her gesture. But let someone impersonate the beggar on the stage and our eye-sight will become adjusted: the peaks and the lines on her face, the stiffly-held mendicant hand are significant, we recognise them as movements of the spirit that is in us all." [2] In a word the dramatist draws our attention to the vivid reality of life.

His next function is to intensify interest in this human picture. Mr. Colum's metaphor of the picture frame does not express the matter quite fully enough. It is not enough for the artist to isolate a piece of life and hold it up to our view in its raw reality. It cannot be said too often that art and life are very different things. However life-like, however realistic art may be, it will never be mistaken for

[1] Preface to *Thomas Muskerry*. [2] *Ibid.*

life; and even if the artist did succeed in so deceiving us there would be little merit in the achievement. It is the function of the dramatist to concentrate the essence of life into his work. He must intensify the interest in his human material by skilful arrangement and co-ordination. He must seize on what is vital and compress it into what we call a dramatic situation, which must be of such a kind as to enable the player to convey the purport to the audience by word and action.

Yet there is another side to art. If from one point of view it may be regarded as a picture of life, it is in a very real sense the efflorescence of the spirit of the artist. These two aspects are in no way contradictory. Every artist, like every man, depends for his personality on the quality of the relationship which exists between himself and his environment. In the artist that relationship is wider in scope and richer in quality. His greater subtlety of mind and delicacy of spirit enable him to react more readily to the stimulus of experience. If then the drama is a picture of life, the quality and character of that picture will depend on the quality and character of the dramatist, for it is only through the medium of the artist that the picture can be seen.

There are many modes which the dramatist may adopt. The history of drama shows how many forms have already been used and there is no reason to think that human inventiveness will not find others. But in all there is a common quality. The dramatist is always a picture maker. He goes to life, he regards it through his own personality and recreates in artistic form what he sees in life. His work of art is an image of life, coloured, it is true, by his own peculiar vision so that it is revelatory not only of life but of his own personality. However carefully the artist withholds his own emotions and refrains from didactic intention, every great drama is and should be his implicit commentary on life. Drama is an image of life; but it must be an interpretative image.

Drama is a serious art, though it has too often been denied this quality. Serious drama is not necessarily sober,

laughless and long-faced; but it is based on a serious appreciation of the worthiness of life and art. Laughter and joy are amongst the worthiest elements of life, and they will, nay must, find a place in serious art. In their attempt to restore seriousness to drama some modern dramatists have leant too heavily on the drab, unhappy side of life. Confusing the rich laughter of healthy life with the silly titter and nasty smirk which debased so much of what passed under the guise of comedy, they placed a wrong interpretation in practice on the idea of seriousness. But this does not mean that the drama, whether tragic or comic, is not truly a serious form of art.

Another tendency of the serious modern dramatist is to over-emphasize the interpretative side of his art. It is a notable fact that a large mass of the best modern drama is obtrusively didactic. Synge, in his splendid way, said that "The drama, like the symphony, does not teach or prove anything." True, it does not set out to teach and prove in the manner of a treatise. All art, we have said, is the efflorescence of the spirit of the artist: it is the expression of the artist's reaction to life and experience. But if the artist is a great person his relation to life will be worthy; and if he has the creative power of embodying that relation in perceptible form the result will teach greatly. In one sense drama is as aimless as a good and beautiful life, which is the natural and inevitable expression of inward truth. On the other hand it is, like great conduct, valuable as a living example and an unspoken precept. No one can submit to the influence of great art or a great life without learning much and receiving beneficial stimulus.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY VICTORIANS

In order to understand, even superficially, the dramatic conditions of the middle of the last century we must go even further back and look at the English drama of an earlier period. In the eighteenth century two tendencies had been going on side by side. There was on the one hand an increasing inclination to fill the stage with stuff which was designed to serve no further end than trivial amusement. Farce, burlesque, satire, light opera were produced in great quantity. The quality was generally beneath contempt, and the writers were often little but translators or at best adaptors of traditional plays. On the other hand there was a vast output of plays which were excessively moral and serious, and which, as the century progressed, were tempered more and more with the tepid current of virtuous and tearful sentimentalism. The former kind lacked seriousness, the latter was without truth. Nor did the absurdly stiff and pompous tragedies serve to bring the stage into contact with life: descended from the heroic plays of Dryden and the formal pieces of which Addison's *Cato* is a typical example, tragedy also was swept into the current of sentimentalism and finally engulfed in the flood-tide of German romanticism with all its ridiculous mysteries, horrors and other impossibilities. In a word there was scarcely a dramatist who succeeded in depicting human nature for its own sake, or even in expressing an honest criticism of life. Their eyes were turned from nature to literary models; their inspiration came not from their own souls but from convention. Fearful

of looking truth in the face they went darkling and without vision.

These tendencies went on unbroken into the nineteenth century. A typical writer of tragedy was Sheridan Knowles. The taste of the time may be judged from the fact that his contemporaries saw in *Virginius* (1820) a return to truth and nature. With the help of Macready, the actor, the play was regarded for twenty-five years as a masterpiece. A bitter critic would stigmatize it as a well-meaning effort. Without going to that length we must confess that it is really a stiff, uncouth and quite absurd production.

Douglas Jerrold did in some respects get more closely into touch with truth. *The Rent Day* (1832) begins as a more or less realistic picture of the misery of peasant life, and we see the horrors of an eviction. But the heavy atmosphere of sentimentalism begins to choke us and the play degenerates into crude melodramatic extravagance. "Was this Jerrold's fault," asks Filon, "or that of a public which insisted upon monster jokes and monster crimes? I am inclined to adopt the latter explanation, for supply is regulated by demand." On the other hand it is equally true that demand may be guided by supply, and perhaps especially in art.

Another play of Jerrold's, *Blackeyed Susan*, had already proved a great success. First produced in 1829 it was to hold the stage for a very long time. It is perhaps at once his most successful and his worst play. It exemplifies those nineteenth century melodramas in which the extremes of good and evil are represented by a process of crude idealization which seems still to please large, if uncritical, audiences. The stage sailor, William, belongs to the same type of character as the conventional Irishman, the cruel rich, and the virtuous old peasant with his innocent daughter. These were some of the main props of a great mass of drama which, for want of anything better, filled the theatres and the pockets of theatrical purveyors.

It is significant that at this time theatres had sunk to a low level. Drury Lane and Covent Garden, the two royal and

privileged theatres, were under poor management. Their directors were not only ignorant and inexperienced, but sometimes even unscrupulous. The theatre fell in popular estimation. It had never recovered fully from the blow struck at it by puritan prejudice. Nor was it a new thing to regard the actor as somewhat of a social outcast. Certainly the reputation of the theatre and of the acting profession was only lowered by the kind of thing on which the public was regaled, when even the privileged theatres had recourse to music, to pantomime and to the egregious hippodrama in a vain struggle to keep themselves above water.

During the first third of the nineteenth century the two great privileged theatres were steadily declining. It is a pitiful tale of incompetence and financial chaos, followed by dramatic deterioration. For five years the famous actor Macready struggled manfully to recapture something of the former reputation first of Covent Garden and then of Drury Lane. It was felt that authors must rally to the side of the actor now turned manager. It is well known that it was in direct response to a request from Macready that Browning in 1836 undertook to write a play for him. The result was the unsuccessful performance at Covent Garden in the following year of *Strafford*.

Another man who rushed into the dramatic arena to support Macready was Bulwer-Lytton. Already well-known for his novels which had captured his contemporaries, Lytton stepped down to uplift the stage to a literary level. With due modesty he gave *The Lady of Lyons* to the public in 1838 without the seal of his name. Cynics may suggest that this form of advertisement is often successful. In the next year, when the curtain of anonymity had been lifted, he produced an even more startling piece, *Richelieu*. In 1840 *Money* was first performed. Although these are not his only plays they are his best known. They strike one now as brazen. Not of the brass which makes no pretension to being anything but base metal, but of the brass which for a moment dazzles and is accepted by the uncritical for gold. These plays won and for long maintained an immense popu-

larity, but we see now that the sentiment is sentimentalism, that the grandeur is a pose, and that the best that can be said of them is that they were rather better than the ordinary run of melodrama in their day. Without help from the dramatists and pressed hard by the growing competition of smaller theatres, Macready recognized his failure and in 1843 he threw up the game.

In considering the dramatic conditions in the middle of the century, what is striking is the notable contrast between the poverty of the drama and the excellence of the acting profession. In 1851 Macready retired from the stage, but he left behind him men and women with such famous names as Charles Kean, Helen Faucit, Charles Mathews, Farren, Buckstone. If not a consequence of this, it was nevertheless a fact that dramatists began to write with an eye on the actors. This actor must have such and such a part, this actress must have a heroine of this or that temperament to suit her special skill. The result was that plays tended to develop along certain fixed lines, and characterization, truth and nature were subordinated to the peculiarities of particular actors and actresses.

Although the English stage was fed more and more by foreign drama there were writers who, besides adapting largely from the French, strove to express a native genius. Tom Taylor achieved enormous popularity on grounds which now seem slender, unless we remember that even to-day as much as in the middle of the nineteenth century it is not dramatic but histrionic and spectacular qualities which earn popularity for a play.

Taylor had written historical tragedy and he had ransacked nineteenth century fiction for pure melodrama. But his eye was chiefly, if not always, on theatrical effect rather than on nature. This was the great fault of the drama at that time. Dramatists would not or could not keep their eye on nature, with the result that their works are artificial, stagey and not true pictures of human character. They neglected psychology for theatricality.

Dion Boucicault was another prolific and successful writer

for the mid-Victorian stage. All the same faults are painfully visible in his work, but at the same time there does peep through all the artificiality a certain truth to nature. He had started out in 1841 with a comedy, *London Assurance*, but he was to become famous for the Irish plays, which he as an Irishman was fitted to write, such as *The Colleen Bawn* (1859), *Arrah-na-Pogue* (1864), *The Shaughraun* (1875), and his earlier *The Octoroon* (1859), a play dealing with American life. These were undisguised melodramas, but if he did not succeed in infusing them with reality, at least he succeeded in investing them with an appearance of truth and nature.

The blame must not be laid wholly at the door of the dramatists. It is true that they failed to raise their art, but they received little help and met many hindrances. If taste was at a low ebb, might not the critics have led it to higher levels? Unfortunately criticism itself had fallen as low. The press relegated dramatic criticism to the meanest place: if it was included at all it was not in order to fulfil the true function of criticism, but apparently out of sheer conservatism which hesitated to abolish what it despised. And then there was the censorship. This archaic relic of one of the most corrupt periods of English political and social life is with us yet. To-day it lays at times a heavy hand on English drama, but in the times which we are considering its baneful effect was equalled only by the monstrous absurdity of the way in which it was employed.

A real difficulty existed in the state of the theatre itself. The privileged houses—Covent Garden and Drury Lane—had not merely declined through mismanagement: the very patent which was supposed to protect them had engulfed them in ruin. They alone might produce Shakespeare and the "legitimate drama," as it was called, but they were debarred from competing on equal terms with the newer theatres. These, though unlicensed, were able to produce a variety of entertainments, which were often more popular and more remunerative. If they did not dare to render Shakespeare they disguised plays by introducing music,

acrobats, performing animals and so on. In the eighteenth century the Haymarket had obtained a limited licence, which enabled its managers to give comedy and musical plays, and this practice was gradually extended. The old puritanical dread of the playhouse began to wane and new rival theatres were springing up on every hand. Thus circumstances were forcing the issue, and it was soon apparent that the liberty of the theatre to engage in free competition could not be restricted for ever, and by an act passed in 1843 the right to a licence was thrown open to any properly conducted playhouse. The old patent houses ceased to be the favoured children of privilege, and henceforth must stand or fall in the ranks of all the theatres.

The first effect of this process of change was undoubtedly a degradation of the drama. Serious dramatists depended on the patent houses and these were decaying. It might be thought that the subsequent emancipation from the fetters of privilege would give a stimulus to the drama. The number of London theatres increased rapidly. From twelve in 1847 the number rose to twenty in 1860. The theatre became a paying business, and the dramatist played his part in contributing to this financial success. Still the drama did not flourish. The theatre was the important thing: and the dramatist wrote down to stage necessities. The easiest thing was to borrow; and thus, as we have seen, two characteristics predominated—theatricality and subjugation to the bondage of foreign models.

So long as the dramatist kept his eye on the stage or the work of other dramatists and disregarded life, there was little chance of improvement. The improvement came, but it was very slow, and it needed a genius to show Europe the path back to nature. That genius was to be the great Norwegian, Henrik Ibsen. In the meantime, however, not a little was done to revive English drama. We have noticed the work of Dion Boucicault which, with all its limitations, was a happy sign in so far as, in the case of some plays at least, a native type seemed to be coming back to the boards. Another man who struck a new note, who worked an English

vein, was Burnand. His burlesque, *Ixion,* which was immensely popular, may perhaps be regarded as the herald of the typically English plays of Gilbert which were to rejoice the hearts of more than one generation of Englishmen.

CHAPTER III

A MID-VICTORIAN

ROBERTSON

But the most important work of reform was to be brought about by a young man who began life as an actor. This was Tom Robertson, the unsuccessful dramatist and thoroughgoing bohemian. In 1865 Marie Wilton, the darling of the Strand Theatre, where she was the life of H. J. Byron's empty but popular burlesques, boldly took and opened The Prince of Wales's Theatre. Byron was her coadjutor in the venture, but things went ill. The autumn came and with it a piece of good fortune. T. W. Robertson, who had eaten out his heart in despair and disappointment through a long period of years, at length wrote a play which succeeded in the provinces. Marie Wilton obtained it, and in November 1865 was produced at The Prince of Wales's Robertson's first famous comedy, *Society*. This was an epoch-making event in English drama. The success was immediate. It is not a great play, but it contained qualities which were novel and at the same time not so much beyond the public that they could not appreciate them. The dialogue is bright: there is a quickness of wit and smartness of repartee. A sufficient flavouring of satire gave it spice. High life is ridiculed, vulgar wealth is held up to laughter, and that bohemianism, which Robertson knew from personal acquaintance, was included in the picture. The whole was skilfully overlaid with a coating of thin sentiment and at the finish all ended well.

Society was a striking success and it was quickly followed by *Ours*, which had a still longer run in the years 1866 and 1867. This play is less sentimental than its predecessor, but it is marred by an absurdly impossible plot. Another triumph was *Caste*, which ran in 1867 and 1868, whilst *School* (1869) surpassed all its forerunners and was played for nearly 400 consecutive performances.

Robertson stands out distinctly in the mid-Victorian period as one who made a very real attempt to bring the stage into closer touch with life. In the light of later developments his colours may appear faded; but in his own day he was undoubtedly a pioneer. To us his characters seem feebly drawn, but his attempts at characterization are remarkable when we compare them with what was usual at that date. His plays have the further merit of being recognizably English,—a very healthy sign at a time when foreign domination of the stage was so strong. Satire is perhaps his chief quality. Even to-day, in reading or seeing Robertson's comedies, one cannot fail to appreciate the cleverness of his satirical thrusts, so pointed but yet not unkind. He did not confine his satire to one particular class. All sorts and kinds of people are held up to ridicule; many sections of society are subjected to his laughter.

Like all good satire, Robertson's comedies are valuable and interesting to the student of manners and of social evolution. In the middle of the last century a new stratification of society resulted from the important economic changes which were taking place or which had taken place earlier and were then producing their effect. The middle class was becoming wealthier and more powerful politically and socially. The new rich have for centuries provided the satirist with material, and Robertson was not slow to see the absurdity of that gross belief in wealth which marked not only the vulgar parvenus who were invading the more select circles of society, but also the more firmly established members of the aristocracy.

In *Society* the following conversation takes place between Lady Ptarmigant, whose position in society was assured by

birth and marriage, and her daughter. Maud rebels against the plans of her mother who designs that she shall marry the graceless son of the vulgar but immensely wealthy manufacturer, Mr. Chodd.

Maud. Mr. Chodd again ?
Lady Ptarmigant. Yes, Mr. Chodd again.
Maud. I hate him.
Lady Ptarmigant. You wicked thing ! How dare you use such an expression in speaking of a young gentleman so rich !
Maud. Gentleman !
Lady Ptarmigant. Yes, gentleman !—at least he will be !
Maud. Nothing can make Mr. Chodd—what a name !—anything but what he is.
Lady Ptarmigant. Money can do everything.

Thus the aristocratic lady. The aforesaid young Mr. Chodd has his own views on wealth, but they are scarcely grosser than Lady Ptarmigant's, though he may express them more bluntly. He is conversing with Maud's accepted but impoverished lover.

Chodd Junior. . . . Capital commands the world. The capitalist commands capital, therefore the capitalist commands the world.
Sidney. But you don't quite command the world, do you ?
Chodd Jun. Practically, I do. I wish for the highest honours —I bring out my cheque book. I want to go into the House of Commons—cheque book. I want the best legal opinion in the House of Lords—cheque book. The best house—cheque book. The best turn-out—cheque book. The best friends, the best wife, the best-trained children—cheque book, cheque book and cheque book.

Crude it may seem, but was its brusqueness unjustified ?

It is a startling change to find oozing out of this harsh stuff the sweet tricklings of sentimentality which was no less truly Victorian. The conversation proceeds :—

Sidney. But " honour, love, obedience, troops of friends " ?
Chodd Jun. Can buy 'em all, sir, in lots as at an auction.
Sidney. Love, too ?
Chodd Jun. Marriage means a union mutually advantageous. It is a civil contract, like a partnership.
Sidney. And the old-fashioned virtues of honour and chivalry ?
Chodd Jun. Honour means not being a bankrupt. I know nothing at all about chivalry, and I don't want to.
Sidney. Well, yours is quite a new creed to me, and I confess I don't like it.

The stalls would have needed a good dose of *Idylls of the King* to restore their equanimity after such a rude shock.

The feminist movement is reflected in Robertson's works. In *School* he satirized the man-made ideal of the doll-wife. Lord Beaufoy says :

> My wife must be a woman . . . not a regulation doll of the same pattern as the other dolls—the same absence of thought, the same simper, same stupid dove-like look out of the eyes. "I love papa, I love mamma. I go to church on Sunday ; I can walk, and talk, and play . . ."

The iconoclastic nature of such notions is emphasized by the pained cry of Farintosh : "Did you ever hear ? It's profane—quite profane." On the other hand he could gird at the extreme feminists, women who thought that the equality of the sexes was to be found in a bold imitation of the male and who consequently desired to have "their clothes made by a he tailor instead of a she milliner. How pleasant for a man and wife to be measured together ; or, at an election, for him to walk arm-in-arm to the hustings with a wretched, half-mad, whole-mannish creature, who votes for the creature you wish to exclude." The sting in the tail shows that he meted out his satire impartially. The final touch is emphasised by Jack's reply :

> I agree with you there ; if women were admitted to electoral privileges, they'd sell them for the price of a new chignon ; man, as a nobler animal, has the exclusive right to sell his vote—for beer !

Robertson perceived the social changes which were going on around him. Here too he dealt out satire with generous impartiality. If he was in sympathy with the spirit of his times it was in the belief that each class should be wisely content to remain in the place where a higher providence had placed it. He implicitly pleads for the virtue of the convenient stratification of society which Victorian England in the main accepted. He ridicules the rebels who strive to climb out of their class. He meets with laughter the bourgeois who intrudes into the aristocracy, and also the proletarian who strives to enter the bourgeoisie. In *Caste* he strives to show what a mistake it is to attempt to mix the

classes, though he is obviously not without traces of that sentimental fiction which had peopled the earlier nineteenth century stage with the virtuous poor. The older melodrama had thriven on the pretty theme of the virtuous poor, the whiteness of whose innocence was accentuated by the dark background of the wicked rich. Nothing would bring down the house so easily as the reward of humble innocence by marriage with the wealthy profligate converted in a fifth act repentance by the strength of virgin purity. However much the Victorians believed in the poor " keeping their place," they were always ready (in fiction) to applaud the chivalry of the highborn youth, even the greatest scoundrel, who stooped to promote injured or merely innocent poverty in the shape of a lovely girl. *Caste* is not unmarked by this influence in the marriage of George D'Alroy, a young aristocrat (untrue to type in that he does not seem to be tainted by the customary villainy of his antetypes), with Esther, the daughter of a boozing old workman who never works. It is Sam Gerridge, the artisan, who " knows his place," who expresses Robertson's view on the inadvisability of attempting to break down class distinctions :

> People should stick to their own class. Life's a railway journey, and mankind's a passenger—first class, second class, third class. Any person found riding in a superior class to that for which he has taken a ticket will be removed at the first station stopped at, according to the bye-laws of the company.

Surely that ought to have pleased the stalls. But here again Robertson's satire is double-edged. The fact is that Sam himself who is a third class worker has just taken a second class ticket as a master plumber.

In the person of Eccles, the proletariat came in for its lashing. Eccles is depicted as ostentatious, wordy and worthless. We hear his drunken wailing over the ills of the oppressed " working man "—he who never did a stroke—his bibulous bragging as a member of " The Committee of the Banded Brothers for the Regeneration of Human Kind, by means of equal diffusion of intelligence and equal division of property." But when it comes to helping his daughter or

minding the baby all his brutality and selfishness stand out in coarse contrast to his pretended principles. Eccles is perhaps the greatest creation which Robertson has achieved. The character is, however, marred by an exaggerated grossness which inspires so much disgust that one is not capable of fully appreciating the dramatic creation.

The stalls also came in for their flagellation in the good natured man-about-town, Captain Hawtree, who is not overburdened with brains, but whose heart is in the right place ; and still more in the marchioness. She is a consummate old snob, and in her treatment of the lovable girl Esther, whom her son has married, she shows as much brutality as the bestial Eccles. His drunken incoherence is indeed no more absurd than her idiotic babblings of Plantagenets and the doughty deeds of her ancestors in whose praise she repeats pages from the Chronicles of Froissart.

Robertson was, however, not concerned with maintaining a social thesis, nor indeed was satire his only aim. The chief merit of the play and the quality which makes *Caste* so important an event in the development of English drama was that the play definitely attempted to depict life. It was, within somewhat narrow limits, a real attempt to restore nature to the drama, and one must believe that it was largely for this reason that the public gave the play so warm a welcome.

Did Robertson then create real characters in the sense that we understand the expression to-day ? One is bound to admit that he did not. Eccles is the only character which is not a stage puppet ; and as time went on Robertson tended more and more to write parts suitable for the actors and actresses of the Prince of Wales's Theatre, with the result that his characterization became stereotyped. At the same time there was a truer psychology in his plays than in those of his contemporaries. Furthermore, the life which he depicted was English. His plays have a certain homely atmosphere which is refreshing. This was produced largely by the " business " for which his plays are remarkable, and which by giving scope to the accomplished actors for whom he

wrote—men like Hare and Bancroft—went a long way to assuring success. There was no danger of an old man's rôle not being successful in the hands of Hare. Bancroft with his perfect polish and blasé superiority was certain to make the part of such a character as Hawtree. A frolicsome and vivacious girl would always be popular with Marie Wilton's acting.

By this time Marie Wilton had become Mrs. Bancroft, and she and her husband as managers had contributed not a little to dramatic development by careful attention to the details of stagecraft and properties. In this they collaborated closely with Robertson, who introduced properties with rare novelty. It was a pleasing innovation for an audience to see on the stage a real bassinette (although the baby was a sham), a real rolling pin and actual tea things. The managers did their share and improved the dresses ; real furniture was introduced ; and they strove to make the scenery more realistic.

It would be easy to point out many respects in which Robertson remained a slave to other conventions. But we must remember that the stage always must be conventional, and it is only a question as to whether the conventions are compatible with illusion. To-day we dislike asides, soliloquies and separate conversations spoken by people who are on the stage together but are supposed to be unconscious of each other. Robertson uses all these devices, and presumably his public accepted them.

Such criticisms are not vital. What is fundamental is that despite many signs of progress and many good qualities in his work Robertson is essentially theatrical. The great ideal beyond which neither he nor his contemporaries could see was *la pièce bien faite*. His plays were therefore popular. Improbability of plot, weak sentimentality, and dialogue, which though smart and quick, consisted of repartee for its own sake, were faults which were covered or overlooked because the plays were well made.

Robertson's plays are exceedingly interesting documents. They reflect very accurately the outlook of the rising

Victorian middle class of England. Snobbery is satirized in all classes. "Everybody," says Filon, "cries out in them against money, but as against a master." Well might the mid-Victorian thus cry out. They are respectable and sufficiently sentimental. But love is a sorry second to money. To quote again the criticism of that acute Frenchman, "Love cuts but a poor figure in comparison, though for form's sake it may triumph for five minutes before the curtain falls."

CHAPTER IV

LATE VICTORIANS

THROUGH the 'seventies the old tendencies persisted. The Bancrofts continued at "The Prince of Wales's" as purveyors of Robertsonian "Cup and Saucer" comedy—the comedy of the middle class. In 1880 they took the Haymarket Theatre and began by making radical constructional changes. They set the stage in a huge gilt frame; the pit, which, from once occupying the whole floor, had been pushed gradually further and further back, they abolished. At the same time they raised the price of the stalls from six to seven shillings and later to half a guinea. Be it said, however, that the increase of the salaries of the actors was even more pronounced than the rise in prices of seats. The public was apparently ready for these changes and the Bancrofts flourished. They would not perhaps have flourished if they had not realized that Robertsonian comedy was beginning to pall. With that tact which goes so far to make commercially successful managers the Bancrofts struck a new vein in French drama. For many a day it was the excitement and skilful artificiality of Sardou, Labiche and such-like that was to prove so popular.

A greater stringency of international Copyright Laws had put a stop to the indiscriminate theft of plays which had done so much in earlier years to check the growth of native English drama. The borrowing from foreign sources was less crude. Mere translation was replaced by adaptation. Often it was only the idea or certain main parts of a piece which were taken as the skeleton on which a new play was constructed.

A famous example of this method is to be found in *Diplomacy* (1878), a play based on Sardou's *Dora*, and produced by Bancroft with immense success. It has been pointed out that in the progress towards a resuscitation of English drama this was the penultimate step. After unambitious borrowings came intelligent adaptation. This was more than transference from Paris to London; for it gave scope for the production of an English atmosphere and thus for the creation of English character.

A name which must always stand large in the movement towards the building up of a real English theatre at the end of the last century is that of W. S. Gilbert. Beginning his career with a pleasing comedy, *Sweethearts*, he developed his tendency towards cynical satire in *Engaged*. The same spirit marked *Dan'l Druce*, *The Palace of Truth*, *Creatures of Impulse* and *The Wicked World*. His early period may be said to have ended with *Pygmalion and Galatea*. With *Trial by Jury* there began a stream which was to develop into that great tide of comic opera where his literary gift met and flowed so harmoniously with the current of Sullivan's music, a tide which carried his contemporaries off their feet and which in this generation shows little sign of falling.

The treatment of Shakespearian drama has often, indeed usually, indicated the condition of the English theatre. After fluctuations in taste and theatrical vicissitudes through more than two centuries Shakespearian presentation had fallen in the middle of the nineteenth century into a sorry plight. In the old days it was the special privilege, as we have seen, of the Royal Theatres to present Shakespeare. When the protection of the patents was removed it was open to any theatre to produce the "legitimate" drama, but in fact managers preferred something more paying. The result was that Shakespeare was practically forgotten and would have gone unacted if it had not been for Phelps, who kept him alive at Sadler's Wells in Islington. In 1874 an important theatrical event took place. Henry Irving, who had made his début eighteen years before at Manchester, had made

a reputation and acquired the Lyceum. *The Bells* and *Charles I* had been great successes, but now he eclipsed his own fame when his *Hamlet* ran for 200 nights. Passing from play to play Irving brought Shakespeare once again into popularity and restored him to a theatrical place such as he had occupied in the palmy days of Garrick or Macready.

One interesting result of this new rising of the Shakespearian sun was the stimulus which it gave to dramatists to work afresh on the Shakespearian model. Wills and Merivale strove to resuscitate romantic drama, but they are to-day quite forgotten. For extraneous reasons we remember, however, that Tennyson wrote historical verse tragedies. Not the least of these reasons was that the personality and power of Irving himself raised these plays to a great height of theatrical success. But with the death of Irving it may truly be said, in more senses than one, that we saw also the death of *Becket.*

Far away and forgotten as these once notable theatrical happenings may be, they were significant of change ; they were also full of happy presage. Irving did succeed in raising theatrical prestige. The actor's was no longer a wholly disreputable profession when in the respectable days of Victoria one of their number was honoured with a knighthood. The theatre was viewed with less suspicion by puritan critics. At the same time dramatic criticism was raised to a higher level by such men as Mr. Clement Scott and Mr. William Archer. This produced its effect on public taste, which gradually developed and became at once more discriminating and more truly appreciative.

GRUNDY

We have referred already to the new practice with regard to borrowing from the French. In 1878 the treatment of Sardou in *Diplomacy* marked an important change. From this time onwards it is adaptation rather than translation which is to mark the work of the rising English playwrights. Sydney Grundy was one of the most assiduous of adaptors.

He laid several French dramatists under tribute—Sardou, Labiche, Scribe. His version of *La Petite Marquise* was followed by *The Snowball*. Both of these were farces and adaptations from the French. They were followed by another, *In Honour Bound*, which was based on *Une Chaîne* by Scribe. The play has a happy end although it borders on tragedy. Skirting the brink of the abyss whilst avoiding the fatal fall it is nearly a domestic tragedy. The play in which Grundy found his feet was *A Pair of Spectacles* (1890), which was taken from *Les Petits Oiseaux* by Labiche and Delacour. The French play is remarkable for its symbolism, which is carried into the English play, but only after being transformed. There are two old brothers. One is Benjamin Goldfinch, a genial, generous old man—an idealization of the Cheeryble type. His brother Gregory is of the family of Ralph Nickleby. He is capable of starving his son, whilst the elder brother has a warm paternal affection and is the devoted lover of his young wife. Benjamin breaks his gold spectacles and borrows Gregory's iron pair, which give his face a demeanour quite unrecognizable by those who knew the cheery, benevolent old man. On discovering he has been hoaxed by a bogus begging letter from Buzzard, an old coachman to whom he has been exceedingly kind, Benjamin is prepared to accept Gregory's doctrine of mistrust in human nature. He adopts his surly brother's misanthropic views and metaphorically as well as actually he sees the world through Gregory's spectacles. Finally, however, he recovers his geniality, and resuming his gold spectacles he sees life once again in the old radiant light. Labiche's symbolism was very different. It is denoted in the original title and remains embedded in the English version, in a conversation between Benjamin and Lucy, the good fairy who wins him back to generosity.

> *Goldfinch.* But, my dear Lucy, Gregory is right. There are a great many impostors about, and poverty is often well deserved.
>
> *Lucy.* No matter. If we all had our deserts, perhaps we should all be poor.
>
> *Goldfinch.* And people are ungrateful—most ungrateful.

Lucy. What if they are ? You do not want their gratitude ?
Goldfinch. That's very true, my dear child. (*Aside*) Gad, she's an angel.
Lucy. Every morning, after breakfast, I open the window and throw out the crumbs to the sparrows. They never thank me. When they have had enough, or I go near them, they all fly away—except some greedy one, which sometimes pecks at me.
Goldfinch. Ah !
Lucy. But I don't want their thanks. They owe no gratitude to me. They are God's creatures, and God gives the crumbs. You have your sparrows, I have mine. Whatever happens let us go on feeding them.

Grundy's symbolism is very different from Labiche's. He wishes to show that our perception of the world is subjective. As we change our mood, as we look through different spectacles, we see a different picture. Not a recondite truth, it may be, but nevertheless one which is easily forgotten.

The play is in many respects weak. The sentiment is washy, the plot is improbable and the impossibility of the quick changes of the persons of the play makes the characterization absurd. Benjamin Goldfinch jumps from an almost futile credulity and benevolence to a no less foolish brutality and suspicious unbelief, and back again to his former unreasoned generosity. This may serve to produce rough comedy, but it is poor psychology. Nevertheless the play is significant. It is especially remarkable as being inspired by a serious theme ; and although an adaptation it is not without certain native qualities.

In 1892 Grundy went a step further and wrote *A Fool's Paradise*. This time he gives us " an original play." It is a crude attempt at domestic tragedy. The plot is gruesome. It tells of an unfaithful wife who attempts to murder her husband and ends by poisoning herself—a story as horrible as the old tale of *Arden of Feversham*. Grundy did not succeed in softening the hard lines of the characterization of melodrama. There is still the harsh contrast between white virtue and black vice. We have on the one hand the callous, criminal wife and the loving husband, perfectly honourable and as interesting as milk. Then there are the inevitable aristocrats, and interwoven with the criminal story there is a romantic love plot. After the ghastly climax of Mrs.

Selwyn's suicide, this is wound up satisfactorily, the poor beauty of the romance turning out to be an heiress.

The critic will find ample scope for attack. It would be hard to defend the crudely absurd plot or the characters, who are nothing more than the inflexible puppets of melodrama. Chance is the mainspring of the story, which is wholly lacking in that inevitability of development which is necessary for tragedy. At the same time the play deserves attention. Like *A Pair of Spectacles* it is noteworthy for its seriousness of theme, but it shows further developments in that it was original and also that it was tragic.

Sowing the Wind (1893) was also "an original play." Romantic, sentimental and improbable alike in plot and characterization, it was serious in purpose and pleaded the cause of illegitimate offspring. It was followed in 1894 by *A Bunch of Violets*, an adaptation of Octave Feuillet's *Montjoye*. It is also tragic and most melodramatic in character. It is very theatrical. The characters are nothing but stage puppets—the dark lady, the implicated man with a past, the wronged, virtuous wife and the beautifully innocent daughter. Withal there is a sickly sentimentalism which centres in a bunch of violets given by the girl Violet to her fraudulent, bigamous father. Still, the play is interesting, not only for its own qualities, but for the fact that it won applause from the theatre-goers of the middle 'nineties.

Grundy is worth study if only for the fact that he made a successful appeal to his contemporaries. His plays were artificial in plot and in characterization: he always seems to have his eye on Scribe or Labiche, or whoever was his immediate model, rather than on men and women. But his contemporaries were less concerned with true psychology than with other dramatic qualities which they found in his work. They wanted sentimentalism and he gave it, often under the cloak of symbolism. He gave them quick dialogue rapped out smartly, which they loved. He gave them something to laugh at even in his serious plays, and above all he never forgot that the one thing needful for success with a Victorian audience was that a drama must be *une pièce*

bien faite. It was "the consummate craftsmanship of a Sardou" [1] which Grundy and his public really wanted.

We shall find as we proceed that by this time other influences, of which Grundy shows no trace, were at work, and a new drama was springing up in the 'nineties. There was a young man called Shaw who was writing most extraordinary and absurd things. But all this new-fangled stuff was not for the respectable majority. They did not want this advanced drama, but they found just what they did want in Grundy. Like most men who have been pioneers, he started in the van and ended in the rear. "Forty years ago," he himself said in 1914, "mine was a voice crying in the wilderness; now that the wheel has not only come full circle, but is whizzing round without a governor, again I find myself in a minority." [2] In the pamphlet where the words occur Grundy sets forth his plea for artificial Victorian drama. In his day he undoubtedly gauged the public taste aright, and there can be no denial that he represented the general view of the "new drama" when he satirized the advanced theatre in a dialogue between Sir Philip Marchant and Mark Murgatroyd, a rough provincial up in town, in *A Bunch of Violets.*

> *Mark.* Nay, I came up to London to enjoy myself—I went to theatre last night!
>
> *Sir Philip.* Indeed!
>
> *Mark.* I read in newspaper as they were playing a masterpiece—thinks I, I've never seen a masterpiece and I just feel in mood for a good laugh!
>
> *Sir Philip.* And did you get it?
>
> *Mark.* Get it—I got the hump. Hero was suffering from some brain complaint—and his wife didn't like it: so she got making eyes at husband's doctor, but that came to nowt, for he had something the matter wi' his ancestors. Well they were seen philandering by t'owd mother, but that came to nowt, for she was paralysed and couldn't tell tales. Then wife and doctor shoot one another—husband shoots himself—and t'auld girl's left alone wi' three corpses.
>
> *Sir Philip.* Ha! Ha! Ha!

[1] Grundy, Sydney, *The Play of the Future* (1914), page 37. This is a violent attack on contemporary drama and a reaffirmation in the boldest terms of the Victorian cult. A most entertaining piece of polemical literature, unfortunately smirched in places by bad taste.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 33.

Mark. And they call that a masterpiece. Well, by gum, you don't catch me at a masterpiece again.

Sir Philip. Wasn't your mind improved ?

Mark. I don't know about that. I only know I woke up wi' a splittin' headache.

Probably the audience would have given Mark their full sympathy.

CHAPTER V

1. H. A. JONES

DESPITE his gibes, Grundy was himself one of the pioneers of serious drama at the end of the nineteenth century. The fact was that Ibsen's influence was pervading the European stage, and even so staunch an admirer of the French artificial drama of Labiche and Scribe was being carried away on the flood which Ibsen had let loose. A more conscious contributor to this movement in England was Mr. Henry Arthur Jones.

After writing some inconsiderable trifles Mr. Jones scored a tremendous theatrical success in 1882 with a full-blooded melodrama, *The Silver King*, of which he was the principal author. This doubtless filled his pocket, but it did not prevent him, as well it might, from becoming a dramatist ; and in 1884 he produced *Saints and Sinners*. This play may not be great drama but it is of striking importance. It undoubtedly has many faults, but it stands almost alone in its day as marking the road along which English drama was to advance. In three respects it was in the van of dramatic development. In the first place it was a definite attempt to consider English life seriously on the stage. We have attempted to trace briefly the earlier efforts in this direction : we have seen the contributions of men like Jerrold, Boucicault and Robertson. Mr. Jones was now to carry English drama another step along the same road, and at the same time such a long step that he may be said to have initiated the vogue of modern serious drama.

Secondly, he held that drama had suffered by the

discontinuance of the practice of printing plays. If the drama depends wholly on the theatre for its propagation the playwright will suffer perhaps excessive influence from stage conditions. Mr. Jones therefore published *Saints and Sinners*, and since then the practice has become prevalent, and to-day almost every dramatist who does not look merely for theatrical success issues his plays in book form.[1] This happy return to the fashion of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has done as much as anything to restore English drama to its place amongst the arts. Mr. Jones went further and wrote a preface. The interest and value of a preface as a means of communication between the author and the public has been demonstrated from Dryden to Mr. Shaw. There is perhaps a danger that the dramatist will tend to rely on the preface to explain what ought to be made clear in the play itself, or he may even become so much enamoured of preface writing that the play becomes a dramatic illustration of a prose treatise. Nevertheless the revival of prefaces has been another step in the direction of restoring seriousness to the dramatist's work and has given him an opportunity of discussing the function and nature of his art in a way impossible by any other means.

The third respect in which *Saints and Sinners* was an important influence was its onslaught on English middle class puritanism. In more recent times we have heard so much of this in drama that we have at length wearied. This theme has been one of the commonest in the drama for the past twenty-five years. Mr. Shaw has perhaps been the most potent influence in this matter, but Mr. Jones preceded him by many years. This play is a very pointed attack on the false religion and the commercialism of the English middle class. The Victorian ideal of social and religious respectability ran admirably in double harness with the belief in self-

[1] It should be explained that the play was published only in 1891. One of the most potent reasons for not publishing plays was the inadequacy of the Copyright regulations as between this country and U.S.A. The acting rights of a published play could not be secured in America. This was a great hardship which was removed by the American Copyright Act of 1891. Thenceforward dramatists could publish without fear of losing American stage rights.

help, duty and the inherent virtue of work. Together they succeeded in building up a vast commercial system and producing wealth on a scale unequalled in the world's history. But if they ran well in double harness it was because each knew that it must mind its own business. As Mr. Jones says in the preface to his play, it is remarkable to notice the "ludicrous want of harmony, or apparently of even the most distant relation of any sort between a man's religious professions and his actions." In the play Hoggard and Prabble are deacons of the local Bethel, of which Jacob Fletcher is pastor. Hoggard is a tanner whose transactions are "businesslike," but his attempt to oppress the widow of his late partner comes to the knowledge of Fletcher. Fletcher is one of the trustees and is able to thwart his plans, but in the end he suffers cruel vengeance from Hoggard. Prabble, a grocer by trade, is not a hard villain like Hoggard, but a sneaking sanctimonious creature, much annoyed by the success of the new Co-operative Stores. As a matter of course he expects Pastor Fletcher to protect him from their dangerous competition. First we hear him complaining to Hoggard.

> *Prabble.* ... I find the members of the congregation are going to the Stores, and I've asked Mr. Fletcher more than once to preach against them. I'm a grocer, and I've got eleven children, and how can I pay my rates and taxes and bring up my family if the Stores are allowed to undersell me, eh? I ask you as a member of the great tax-paying middle class.
>
> *Hoggard.* Very true, Prabble. The middle classes are the great backbone of this country. It's such men as you and I, Prabble, that are the source of England's greatness. We have made England what she is to-day.

This was good social criticism. It may seem somewhat threadbare to-day, but we must recollect that it is nearly forty years old. It is serious but it is not dull. The subtlety and irony, especially in Hoggard's last remark, are still fresh. At this point Fletcher arrives and again refuses to preach against the Stores. Prabble is genuinely unable to understand his objection. To him it is so obvious and clear:

> If I support your chapel, I expect you to get the congregation to support my shop. That's only fair.

Mr. Jones also directed the attack against the dullness and the repression which accompanied the hypocrisy and materialism of the society he was exposing. Fletcher's daughter, Letty, is oppressed by the drab and soulless philistinism of the puritan middle class provincial town in which they exist :

> *Letty.* ... How sick I am of it all !
> *Jacob.* Sick of what, dear ?
> *Letty.* Of this silly town, and our silly people. Everything in Steeplefold is so commonplace, and so respectable, and nothing ever happens, and you and I are buried under it all !

The play is in many ways open to censure. The plot is melodramatic, the incidents sensational and the characterization is often weakly conventional. The innocent daughter of a pious minister is seduced by a typical stage villain, one Captain Fanshawe. The true lover is a simple, honest young farmer, George Kingsmill, a stock pattern of virtue, forgiveness and chivalry. Troubles fall on the devoted head of the pious pastor in direct proportion to his goodness, and sentiment recruits our emotions for the cause of virtue. We have the satisfaction of seeing the cruel Hoggard hunted as a criminal ; Fanshawe meets an appropriately sudden death ; George Kingsmill returns in the nick of time before the curtain falls finally. But despite all that is false and unreal there is no question that Mr. Jones had found the right road. The fact that he was not afraid to forgo the conventional happy ending showed that he was a man of some courage. The death of Letty in the final scene was, to say the least, unconventional. Ten years later English dramatists dared to write a domestic tragedy, but it was a novelty in 1884.

As we have already suggested, it was in his belief in drama as a great art that Mr. Jones was a revolutionist. Not content to accept the current attitude towards drama as merely the means of three hours' amusement in the theatre, he wanted to restore it to its high place as a great form of art and as a criticism of life. There is no reason to believe that he would have denied the necessity that drama should please, or that it should provide amusement. Art may be serious

without being sombre, and it was for a serious drama that Mr. Jones was fighting. The preface is very illuminating on this point. There he accounts for "the comparative intellectual and literary degradation of the modern drama for two or three generations past" by reference "to the fact that plays have been chiefly considered and exploited from their purely theatrical side." He realized fully that a play is not the same as life, and he did not fail to understand the great difference between realism and reality. His contention was that the English drama instead of being merely "the art of sensational and spectacular illusion . . . the art of building up an ingenious Chinese puzzle of comic or thrilling situations" should be "mainly and chiefly the art of representing English life."

The real question is whether we go to the theatre to escape from life, or whether, on the contrary, we go to see a picture of the life we know, or recognize imaginatively as true, and so take pleasure in studying it as the dramatist displays it before our eyes. For a hundred years or more the former theory of drama had prevailed. Mr. Jones led the way towards the new ideal, and thus infused modern drama with one of its most vitalizing qualities. Robertson and the Bancrofts had tried to give reality by purely mechanical means. Mr. Jones recognized that something more fundamental was necessary. "It is of the smallest moment to be 'true to nature' in such mint and cummin of the stage as the shutting of a door with a real lock, in the observation of niceties of expression and behaviour . . . it is . . . of the smallest moment to be 'true to nature' in these, if the playwright is false to nature in all the great verities of the heart and spirit of man." [1] He was far-sighted enough to see that the movement of the age was towards "a steadfast and growing attempt to treat the great realities of our modern life upon our stage, to bring our drama into relation with our literature, our religion, our art and our science, and to make it reflect the main movements of our national thought and

[1] Jones, H. A. Introd. to English translation of Filon, *The English Stage*, p. 12.

character." [1] *Saints and Sinners* was an honest, if faulty, attempt to do this.

Mr. Jones has written many and diverse plays, some better and some worse; but none is so important in the development of dramatic tendencies as *Saints and Sinners*. *Judah* (1890) is an exceedingly interesting study of the stern religious conscience of English puritanism in Judah himself. Melodrama is disappearing and the satire is less crude. The material is tragic, but the dénouement is happy. It is an example of that genre which was to be known as "drama"—the modern attempt to meet the need which had been supplied by the tragi-comedy of an earlier day. In *The Middleman* (1889) he had returned to the theme of English commercialism. In *The Masqueraders* (1894) he made a violent attack on the hollow mockery of marriage and the sham life in high society. In 1896 was produced one of his most ambitious and perhaps his greatest play, *Michael and His Lost Angel*. The influence of Ibsen and the repercussion of the work of Sir Arthur Pinero are apparent in this drama, which is frankly tragic. Leaving on one side the irrelevant grounds on which the play was originally attacked, in particular its supposed irreverence for religion, one feels that it lacks the stuff of great tragedy. Aubrie Lesden is a subtle piece of characterization, but she is too small a human soul to bear the burden of real tragedy, and the hero, Michael Faversham, is at best a stiff and somewhat bloodless creature. *Saints and Sinners* is undoubtedly more faulty as a play, but it is a more striking landmark in dramatic development. By the date of *Michael and His Lost Angel* domestic tragedy was almost a re-established form. We shall see very shortly what important work Sir Arthur Pinero had contributed to this genre by 1896. This play does not therefore demand the same attention that we bestowed on the early tragedy. It is intrinsically superior, but from an evolutionary point of view it must be regarded not as the first of a species but as a more highly developed example of a type

[1] Jones, H. A. Introd. to English translation of Filon, *The English Stage*, p. 15

which was revolutionary in its novelty in 1884 but which had reached its dull middle age by 1896.

In his later work Mr. Jones has often fallen under the sway of the aristocratic ideal, if one may so term it. In some of his most striking drama he has utilized the middle class life of the provinces as dramatic material, but in many of his plays he has preferred to take as his theme the lives of the richest and most select grade of society. Such a milieu is suitable for comedy, but even in his plays which are designed perhaps primarily for comic effect Mr. Jones is rarely able to escape a certain earnestness of purpose. *The Masqueraders* and *The Liars* (1897) are two good examples of ostensibly comic plays unmistakably marked by serious intention.

2. PINERO

Perhaps the most typical dramatist of the 'nineties was Sir (then Mr.) A. W. Pinero. Beginning life as an actor, he learned stage-craft on the other side of the curtain and very soon began to write short, and now forgotten, pieces. In 1881 he turned to more serious work in *The Squire*, a play which is made of stuff adaptable to tragedy but actually worked up to a romantic "happy ending." He returned, however, for a few more years to comedy, or rather to farce, and before 1887 produced, in addition to more ephemeral work, such excellent fun as *The Magistrate*, *The Schoolmistress* and *Dandy Dick*. These may not be works to which can be assigned a dwelling-place in the House of Fame, but they were significant and influential. Truly English in atmosphere and circumstance, and relying on comic character rather than on mere bustle and absurdity of incident, these plays opened out a more hopeful prospect for English comedy. The contribution of Robertson had been important, but his directing influence seemed to be losing effect. In these plays Sir Arthur Pinero gave a new and exceedingly beneficent stimulus to English comedy. The noticeable feature of his art is versatility, and never has Sir Arthur Pinero clung long to one mode without a change. In 1888 he scored a

tremendous theatrical success with *Sweet Lavender*, a romantic comedy, strongly flavoured with sentimentalism and reminiscent of the stagey, well-made pieces of Robertson. It is thoroughly artificial and in every sense redolent of the theatre, but it hit the public taste of the moment with sure aim.

By 1890 the influence of Ibsen on European drama was becoming very pronounced. We have seen that as early as 1884 Mr. Jones was imbued with a sense of the seriousness of drama as a criticism of life and the possibilities of treating in a prose play the deeper currents of social conditions and human personality. We have also noticed the work of Grundy, and we have made reference to the indications which Sir Arthur Pinero himself had given in *The Squire* of a desire to deal with the more serious side of life. But it was in 1887 that he turned definitely to tragedy in *The Profligate*, which was produced in 1889. In this play he is obviously working in an untried genre, and he does not attain that sureness of touch which was to make his reputation as a tragic dramatist. The didactic tendency is in places obtrusive. Speeches are long and marked by an ominous seriousness and by sententious utterance: they are not the speeches of real people. Plot and characterization are weak in several respects, and in many ways the play is feeble. The purport of the play is to show that a man cannot live the bad life of Dunstan Renshaw and, quietly putting the past behind him, settle down to marriage and happiness with a pure, innocent girl like Leslie. The profligate's nature is soiled and the stain is indelible. Furthermore, character is destiny and the law of destiny is inevitable. The marriage of Renshaw and Leslie is inevitably fraught with ruin. The dramatist followed the traditional course of tragedy and loosened the knot by the death of Renshaw. The profligate, realizing the wreck of his marriage, takes poison. It is highly indicative of the state of the drama in the 'eighties that when the play was acted Sir Arthur Pinero suffered his better judgement to be over-ridden by the demands of the actor, based on the supposed state of public

taste, and wrenched the dénouement into a " happy ending." The play, at the best imperfect, was ruined. Only the most casual and uncritical spectator could be satisfied by the unreality of the " happy ending " or be deceived into finding therein any happiness.

The vein which Sir Arthur Pinero struck in *The Profligate* was to prove a rich lode. Between 1893 and 1909 he produced half a dozen plays which gave him a commanding position as dramatist and which are profoundly important in the development of modern drama. These plays are domestic dramas of the same kind as *The Profligate*; but, unlike that play, they are the work of a craftsman who has passed his 'prentice stage. The first and most important was *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. This play, produced in 1893, is in one sense complementary to *The Profligate*: it also shows that the past cannot be put behind us, the old story that we must inevitably reap as we have sown. Paula is not merely a woman who, having lived a loose life, turns to the path of married virtue. That is the superficial aspect of her conduct. It seems an obvious case for heaven to rejoice over a sinner brought to repentance, a black heart washed white. What a shame it is that she is unable to shake off the burrs of the past, that fortune marks her out for ghoulish tricks which ensnare her in the trammels of a former way of life. But the fact is that the past, the present and the future are one. Life is an organic whole of which each part is dependent on and strictly related to the rest. Paula's soul has deteriorated. Her character is not merely stained, it has become what it is as the result of her whole life. No turning over a new leaf will alter what she is. Here as much as in *The Profligate* the truth is brought out that character is destiny. Her character is what it is. We are not asked to attach blame: merely to accept truth. She is what she is, a stunted, warped, damaged thing, and she can never be anything else. Her marriage is bound to end in failure. It may seem that the dramatist gives coincidence a somewhat incredibly long arm; but that is not a vital matter. If it were not one thing it would be another. The pitcher might go

many days to the well. In the end it must be broken. That is the essential truth embodied in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*.

The important feature in Sir Arthur Pinero's dramas is that, after he had gained confidence in his art, he was not afraid to follow his plot to a logical end. He passed the artificial sentimentalism of his own earlier art and that of his contemporaries and had the courage to allow his characters scope for their own natural development. In several of these plays the dramatist developed the practice of Ibsen and wrote a tragedy without the time-honoured dénouement which depended on the death of the protagonist. In *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* and in *Iris* the substance is essentially tragic, but the plays end on a doubtful, uncertain note. We feel that one volume is closed, but of the next we are told nothing. This was undoubtedly in the direction of realism. The playwright of the past had striven to round off his dramatic story. At the expense even of reality he had juggled with fact in order to make his ending 'satisfactory.' The result was that dramatists had become enslaved by the idea of a neat dénouement even at the expense of truth. It was undoubtedly a healthy sign that an English dramatist, following the example of Ibsen, should dare to follow the logic of events and have more concern with reality than with convention. Realism is in itself useless, but reality is vital. If realism means that an artist is in revolt against unreality it is a happy portent for his art.

The fundamental failing in Sir Arthur Pinero's tragic art is that it is made of human stuff which is too mean. We need no longer assert that tragedy must have persons who are socially great, that only kings and queens, lords and noble ladies, are suitable *dramatis personæ*. It is nevertheless true that the characters must be great as human beings. Comedy may be made of mean human stuff, but tragedy demands greatness. It does inspire us with pity and terror to witness the downfall of an Antony or the ruin of a Macbeth; but we can be no more than harrowed by the destruction of poor creatures like Paula Tanqueray or Zoë Blundell.[1]

[1] *In Mid-Channel*, 1909.

This is not an indictment of all domestic tragedy, but of tragedy in which the characters lack that grandeur which is necessary to elevate the psychological struggle to a sufficiently high level.

Dunstan Renshaw, Paula Tanqueray, Zoë Blundell, all of them spoil their lives and, crushed under the trouble, commit suicide. Self-murder in a great character wrecked by circumstance or by some fatal blow may be grand and awful, but in a realistic modern play it tends to meanness. The civilized modern is growing beyond the barbarous practices of murder and suicide and has resort to the civil or divorce courts, unless he is morally or mentally weak. The dénouement of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is more inevitable than the others, but in every case the nature of the characters and the circumstances give the impression of sordidness and cowardice rather than of grandeur and nobility.

Sir Arthur Pinero undoubtedly led the drama along the road towards reality, but all his plays are marked strongly by theatrical tradition. He is always stagey. Despite a real advance towards truth of characterization many of his persons have something of the mechanical appearance of stage puppets. This is especially true of the minor characters, who appear and reappear and always play the same kind of part and say the same kind of thing in the same kind of way. He acquired the knack of constructing *une pièce bien faite ;* and the method varies little. He alters the arrangement with great skill, but the time comes when we weary of the expensive passionate woman, the well-dressed lustful young man, the aristocratic old roué, the coldly virtuous lady, the kindly woman friend of the expensive passionate woman. Most Pineroesque of all perhaps is the worldly wise, not too young, friend and adviser who does his ineffectual best to smooth out the creases of life and loosen the inevitable conjugal entanglement. By a process of dramatic metempsychosis he appears as Cayley Drummle in *Mrs. Tanqueray*, Archibald Kane in *Iris*, and Peter Mottram in *Mid-Channel*.

Sir Arthur Pinero held that the proper milieu for drama was to be found in the haunts of the aristocracy. Consequently

we are hardly ever away from the luxurious drawing-rooms of Mayfair or the sumptuous country haunts of the rich, unless we are taking holiday in expensive continental resorts. His plots are generally conducted regardless of cost, and in *Iris* the tragedy springs from the inability of a wealthy woman to exchange riches and comfort for poverty and love. This is doubtless a much truer view of modern life than the romantic absurdities of love in a cottage which had filled the stage in an earlier day, but it is a terrible indictment of society. And the question arises whether in such a rotten state of human perversion it is possible to find the greatness of circumstance and character on which tragedy depends. It was not as if social superiority and rank implied, as they had in older tragedy, an elevation to a high plane of nobility where grand passions might have freer play. On the contrary, Sir Arthur Pinero often introduces aristocratic and wealthy members of society as subjects of satire. This may be very proper in comedy, but it is questionable whether in tragedy it does not result in actual debasement and in producing that meanness which we have found too prevalent in his art.

Sir Arthur Pinero is notable for the brilliance of his dramatic dialogue. His skill in repartee and in the rapier thrust of wit is consummate. This is a quality of extreme value to the writer of comedy ; but it is doubtful how far it assists the tragic playwright. It certainly helps to give that relief which all tragedy needs and enables the dramatist to dispense with the more obviously comic element which other writers introduce. But it also enhances the air of artificiality which we have already noticed as characteristic of these plays. But when we have made all the strictures which Sir Arthur Pinero's work seems to deserve, however much we are conscious of staginess, artificiality and absence of essential greatness in his tragedy, none can fail to appreciate the very real and great contribution which he has made to the English theatre. No one in the 'nineties fought harder than he, or more effectually, to destroy the convention that a play was a mere means of amusement, and to regain the

right of the dramatist to regard his art seriously ; in a word to rehabilitate the drama as a criticism of life.

It must not be thought that in turning to serious drama Sir Arthur Pinero bade farewell to his early lighter manner. Immediately after *Mrs. Tanqueray* he gave free rein to absurdity and whimsicality in *The Amazons*, a farcical commentary on the New Woman movement which, though obsolete to-day, was a vital social question in 1893. Throughout the period when he was writing his more sombre dramas he turned repeatedly to comedy, and although his serious work is undoubtedly his most important dramatic contribution it must be remembered that the great bulk of his plays are comic.

CHAPTER VI

SHAW THE ICONOCLAST

1. *Dramatic Iconoclast*

Mr. Jones and Sir Arthur Pinero had done no little service in leading English drama into the track first followed by Ibsen. They are rightly regarded as pioneers. They gave new direction to the drama and reclaimed its lost kingdom in the realm of art; but they were never emancipated fully from the nineteenth century ideals of stagecraft with its artificiality and love of *la pièce bien faite*. It remained to another writer, Mr. G. B. Shaw, to carry on the work of clearing the ground. He found a trail blazed, but no more. First as a critic and then as a creative dramatist he proceeded to fell one deeply rooted convention after another until at length the stage was littered with the rank and distorted growth of a former day.

This book is no place to attempt anything in the nature of an exhaustive account of Mr. Shaw's work. Our object is rather to trace the lines of development of drama as a whole and with that aim in view to show how individual dramatists have contributed to the main current. Undoubtedly Mr. Shaw's first contribution was negative. He destroyed what was obstructive, so that he himself, and younger men who succeeded him, might build afresh. It will therefore be our first task to examine the various ways in which he attacked the ideals and practice of Victorian drama.

An outstanding feature of nineteenth-century drama had been the heroine, a roseate type of charming, ingenuous

girlhood. Dissatisfied with this bloodless idealization, Mr. Shaw began his dramatic career by writing a play (*Widowers' Houses*, 1892) in which the heroine, Blanche Sartorius, is the frankly brutal daughter of a brutal father. An early stage direction in the printed play prepares us for an unconventional heroine :

> a well-dressed, well-fed, good-looking, strong-minded young woman, presentably lady-like, but still her father's daughter. Nevertheless fresh and attractive, and none the worse for being vital and energetic rather than delicate and refined.

We are consequently not too greatly surprised when she attacks her maid-servant like a fury, seizing her by the hair and throat. We learn that on a former occasion she had emphasized her disapproval by cutting the wretched girl's head open. The orthodox heroine had been all pity and gentleness. Floating on the tide of humanitarianism which lapped the stony beach of poverty, she occasionally stepped from her luxurious pinnace to do some soft act of charity. Blanche is of sterner stuff : " Oh I hate the poor," she exclaims. " At least, I hate those dirty, drunken, disreputable people who live like pigs." Surely her instinct is right, though misapplied. Her clean humanity instinctively revolts at squalor and vice, but her healthy detestation of the real vileness is directed not against the vileness itself or its actual cause, but against its victims. She knows what the cause is : it is the system which enables her father to rack-rent the poor and so maintain her in luxury. She feels how much better and healthier is her refinement than the squalor of the ignorant, drunken poor : angered by the perversity of the situation she vents her spleen on the wretched victims on whom she battens.

Blanche is the first of those many heroines who embody Mr. Shaw's ideas on love and courtship. The Victorian heroine had listened with trembling and blushing hesitancy to the ardent wooing of a strong male. Blanche is the first of those Shavian heroines who themselves participate actively in love-making. The play was unquestionably novel in many ways, and it was doubtless a matter of immense

satisfaction to its author that it should have been received not without noisy protestations. He tells us in the preface with relish: "It made a sensation out of all proportion to its merits or even its demerits; and I at once became infamous as a dramatist."

The Philanderer was written, though not acted, in 1893, a date at which the New Woman was a figure of the hour. Modern feminism was taking a somewhat militant shape and its adherents looked to Ibsen as to a prophet. The Ibsen Club, to which most of the *dramatis personæ* of this play belong, recruits its members from both sexes. In the female members Victorian charm and grace are replaced by matter-of-fact independence. "Every candidate for membership must be nominated by a man *and* a woman, who both guarantee that the candidate, if female, is not womanly, and if male, is not manly." Cuthbertson, who is clearly a fish out of water in this milieu, explains however that it is not really as bad as it sounds. "Of course the usual tone of the club is low, because the women smoke and earn their own living and all that; but still there's nothing actually to complain of."

Sylvia, the New Woman *par excellence*, is quite callous as to her father's health. It is of no interest to her whether or not he is stricken with a mortal disease. The new code, fathered on poor Ibsen, is that "No woman is the property of a man. A woman belongs to herself and to nobody else." With his usual two-edged weapon Mr. Shaw embodies his views in characters who are so exaggerated that he can extract comedy from their absurdities and yet maintain an appearance of impartiality by cloying us with excess of the very doctrine he wishes to set forth. Sylvia would be detestable if she were not ridiculous. Julia, her sister, is by nature so feminine that she cannot support the advanced doctrines which, according to the very just accusation of Charteris, are "merely a fashion picked up and followed like any other fashion, without understanding or meaning a word of them." When she learns that after all her father's disease is not mortal, she is too womanly to be able to repress

tears of joy. In the end she is enamoured, not of the 'new' philanderer, but of the more old-fashioned lover, Dr. Paramore.

The development of a new type of dramatic heroine is an important feature in Mr. Shaw's third play, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893). Vivie is a mathematician. She is not a delicately cultured young lady, not even a facile genius. She worked for her Tripos for the sordid motive of winning £50.

> "Culture!" she exclaims. "My dear Mr. Praed: do you know what the mathematical tripos means? It means grind, grind, grind, for six to eight hours a day at mathematics, and nothing but mathematics . . . Outside mathematics, lawn-tennis, eating, sleeping, cycling, and walking, I'm a more ignorant barbarian than any woman could possibly be who hadn't gone in for the tripos."

The conventional Praed is horrified at such blasphemy against his ideal of womanhood:

> *Praed.* You make my blood run cold. Are you to have no romance, no beauty in your life?
> *Vivie.* I don't care for either, I assure you.
> *Praed.* You can't mean that.
> *Vivie.* Oh yes I do. I like working and getting paid for it. When I'm tired of working, I like a comfortable chair, a cigar, a little whisky, and a novel with a good detective story in it.

This may seem crude enough to-day, but in 1893 it was significant of a dramatic revolution. The great fact was that Vivie had a "way of life" of her own. It was a masterstroke of irony to embody the conventional horror of feminine independence in a woman of the character of Mrs. Warren. Vivie's mother practises the vilest, most degrading profession to which woman can stoop: she is a fashionable procuress for wealthy debauchees. Yet it is she who is shocked—genuinely shocked—at the "unwomanly independence" of her daughter. Mr. Shaw doubtless gave her that 'profession' as symbolizing the most horrible aspect of the social and economic dependence of woman on man. But Mrs. Warren does not perceive these sociological niceties. Whilst earning her livelihood by helping to fill the social cesspit,

she is personally a sentimental woman of her day. Mr. Shaw illustrates the fact that there is a close relation between sexual immorality and the convention which regards woman as dependent on man. Deprive woman of the intellectual equipment and the social and economic status which allow her to compete in the world for a livelihood, consider her rather as a beautiful, gentle creature, most lovely when most idle and most melting, and she has only her sex on which to fall back. Thence will arise the evils on which Mrs. Warren thrives. Vivie represents the opposite ideal. For a moment she is likely to relapse into emotion : after all her mother is her mother. But facts, as she has come to see them in the cold light of reason, are strangely brutal ; and she cannot love a woman of Mrs. Warren's profession even though she is her mother. Her emotions are overruled by her intellect and she realizes that their ways must for ever lie apart. Her heart has yearned for maternal love ; but suddenly the idealized picture has dissolved and clearly and unmistakably there stands out the figure of a sexual vampire, Mrs. Warren —procuress. The agony of thwarted affection vibrates in the cold, hard tone in which Vivie, disillusioned, exclaims :

> Mr. Praed : once for all, there is no beauty and no romance in life for me. Life is what it is ; and I am prepared to take it as it is.

To-day woman has gone far towards attaining man's estate. In 1893 she was suffering from growing pains. Of such Vivie was a symbol.

Mr. Shaw's iconoclasm went deeper than merely to attack the conventional type of heroine, and he cut to the root of the whole problem of sex. Not liking to recognize the brutal, animal facts of sex, the middle ages had striven to obscure them in a roseate mist of sentiment which has lived in the vague term chivalry. At all stages of its growth society needs the repressive and directive influence of conventions, and these conventions to be effective must have their roots in the emotions. The part played by reason depends on the stage of civilization. In a primitive society the basis may be wholly emotional, but as the human mind is developed

other forces come into play. Before reason can shoulder even part of the burden effectively it will examine the bases of these conventions. The thinker may grow sceptical and demand a readjustment of ideals, so that a new set of conventions, influenced by reason, replaces the more elementary code. Such is the demand at the root of many modern movements and not least the feminist movement. The middle ages had found it socially dangerous to regard man and woman as procreators of an animal species, so they had wrapped up the facts of human propagation in a veil of romance. Mr. Shaw, who had imbibed the scientific teaching of the nineteenth century,—himself a man who fearlessly cast the dry light of reason on to sentimental institutions,—did not shrink from attacking the fundamental question of love. In his treatment of the heroine in his early plays, which have already been examined, a new attitude towards love is implied. But in subsequent dramas a definite theory becomes plain.

Mr. Shaw strips courtship of romance and depicts it as a sex war in which woman, instinctively and subconsciously charged with the will to perpetuate the race, tracks down and finally captures the man who shall father her children. Woman the huntress seemed a terrible figure to the romantic ideal of Victorianism, which could see in such a figure only the indecent, ungoverned lust of a Cleopatra. But Mr. Shaw is not one to recoil from what he believes to be scientific fact because it may not accord with the prettiness of accepted beliefs. His idea may not be particularly original. Indeed the kernel of his doctrine of love and the relation of the sexes is to be found in Schopenhauer, especially in his *Metaphysics of Love*. Mr. Shaw's happy knack is to seize more quickly than most the significance of what is new in thought and discovery, and present it in such a pleasant and effective manner as to make it lodge in the consciousness of the public.

The idea of the huntress heroine was first displayed clearly in *You Never Can Tell* (1900). Valentine to outward appearances is the assailant ; but in fact it is Gloria, repelling

but to attract, who is really dragging him irresistibly to the doom of marriage. But it was in *Man and Superman* (1903) that the doctrine was most fully expressed. Obsessed by the lust for modernity Mr. Shaw abandons so old-fashioned a word as love and renames that ancient idea the Life Force. The Life Force is Schopenhauer's natural instinct for race preservation, in which woman creatrix is the active participant and man the mere means by which she can achieve her ends. The notion is made obvious by the simple device of caricature. Dramatic exaggeration reduces the wretched man to a slave hunted by woman's devouring will to create. In vain John Tanner, fully conscious of her designs, attempts to evade capture. He knows her fell intention. Young, rich and independent, he struggles against subjugation to her purpose which will reduce him to a helpless agent, useful to carry out the behest of nature, but hereafter to be shackled by marital and paternal ties.

> *Octavius.* Dont be ungenerous, Jack. [Women] take the tenderest care of us.
>
> *Tanner.* Yes, as a soldier takes care of his rifle or a musician of his violin. But do they allow us any purpose or freedom of our own? Will they lend us to one another? Can the strongest man escape from them when once he is appropriated? They tremble when we are in danger, and weep when we die; but the tears are not for us, but for a father wasted, a son's breeding thrown away. They accuse us of treating them as a mere means to our pleasure; but how can so feeble and transient a folly as a man's selfish pleasure enslave a woman as the whole purpose of Nature embodied in a woman can enslave a man?

But all in vain: Ann is too strong for him. Nature is on her side and the Life Force sweeps him away on its irresistible tide. What man can withstand the attack? He is outflanked and undermined. The enemy is within as well as without. The ordinary man is so blind that he does not realize that it is an attack. John Tanner, the Apostle of Hominism, sees the facts in their true light. He realizes that the fight is hopeless because Nature has so made man that he wants to be defeated. As long as she can fulfil her purpose she will stoop to any wile, and so she deceives him into thinking that he is the assailant and woman the coy

refuser. Not only is the foe within the gate; general and army are on the side of the enemy.

> *Tanner.* Tavy: that's the devilish side of a woman's fascination: she makes you will your own destruction.
> *Octavius.* But it's not destruction: it's fulfilment.
> *Tanner.* Yes, of *her* purpose; and that purpose is neither her happiness nor yours, but Nature's. Vitality in a woman is a blind fury of creation. She sacrifices herself to it: do you think she will hesitate to sacrifice you?

Mr. Shaw is exceedingly fertile in devices for dragging doctrine into his plays. *Man and Superman* is pre-eminently didactic, and the third act dream episode in the shades is primarily a means of providing him with a platform on which he may rehearse a debate on the various ideas which are implicit in the whole play but which he wishes to emphasize more explicitly. Don Juan—the spirit counterpart of John Tanner in the nether world—expresses the same idea with regard to love.

> *Don Juan.* . . . Do you not understand that when I stood face to face with Woman, every fibre in my clear critical brain warned me to spare her and save myself. My morals said No. My conscience said No. My chivalry and pity for her said No. My prudent regard for myself said No. . . . And whilst I was in the act of framing my excuse to the lady, Life seized me and threw me into her arms as a sailor throws a scrap of fish into the mouth of a seabird.

Considering the traditional character of Don Juan this is pretty paradox. That is just as Mr. Shaw wishes. The old idea of Don Juan's character symbolizes the conventional notion of man romantic and lion-hearted, capturing the trebly fortified heart of timid maidenhood. With one gesture Mr. Shaw demolishes the traditional theory and builds up his new doctrine. The gesture, by virtue of its paradox and iconoclasm, captures the attention and makes his meaning clear. To anyone with a sense of humour the superficial absurdity of the notion is disarming; and, the critical faculty smothered with laughter, we are persuaded even against our better judgement. Yet the paroxysm passes and we are able to collect our senses and consider more coolly what we perceive to be the vitally constructive

elements of the play. But this is a chapter on Mr. Shaw's iconoclasm and a discussion of the constructive, positive element in *Man and Superman* will find a more fitting place elsewhere. Suffice it to point out here that the play, whilst destructive of the time-worn and faded figure of the modest heroine, progressed beyond Mr. Shaw's earlier work in embodying a very definite philosophy of love. This idea that woman, as nature's agent, is the active instigator of love is developed again with increased emphasis in *Misalliance* (1910). Percival is hunted unmercifully by Hypatia until he is clutched in the grip of the Life Force and becomes the doomed wooer.

The same point of view underlies Mr. Shaw's treatment of wifehood as well as maidenhood. One of the leading social features of Victorian England was its boasted home life. The perfect home needed a docile, dependent wife. She might be a capable, and even independent, woman in her capacity as mother and mistress of her household ; but as a wife she must lean decorously on the superior strength of her husband. *Candida* (1895) shows a new type. Candida is a good wife produced by the new ideals of feminist independence which were beginning to take form. She is maternal. She is however depicted as the supporter not of her children but of her husband. Yet she is no mannish creature, that tailor made product of the Ibsen Club, which Mr. Shaw showed in *The Philanderer*. She is independent in mind, but not infected by the petty, snobbish kind of feminism which advertized itself in bloomers. She is " thoroughly domesticated," even to slicing onions. She is married to a man who is at once strong and weak, a man whose faults she fully recognizes but for whom she has a noble woman's love. It is part of his weakness that he fears even for a moment that she will break up their married life and fling herself into the arms of a flaccid, sentimental, would-be poetic youth, Marchbanks. One would expect a wife of the late Victorian stage to follow the dramatically orthodox course and cast her love on the devoted, romantic poet. But curiously enough she prefers to continue loving her husband. Like

the rest of Mr. Shaw's heroines she has clean emotions springing from clear intellect. She is too wise to become a prey to uncontrolled sentiment and passion. Vivie and Silvia Craven thought they could crush emotion out of life. In the end they will be conquered, for Nature will not have it so. To-day we appreciate more fully the penalty that is paid for sexual repression. The psychologists have shown how much nervous disease is attributed to this very cause. Candida is in no danger of Nature's punishment. She is able to face facts and to rede life's problem. The frightened creatures who are scared by the reality of sex try to push it behind them out of sight. She grasps the problem honestly and by means of a strong mind working in a healthy nature she succeeds in extracting the right solution.

The year before (1894) Mr. Shaw turned his iconoclastic hammer against a very different stage image. For generations the heroic warrior had been held up to honour in a glow of romantic belief in his bravery. Decked in gold lace and an altogether uncomfortable, unserviceable, but gorgeous, uniform, he had swaggered to death on the hot battle-fields of Europe and beyond the footlights of the stage. The very good reason for tricking him out in so unpractical a kit was that it helped to exploit his fear of appearing a poltroon and to overcome the natural cowardice which might induce him to run away at the wrong moment. But Mr. Shaw has no appreciation for the romance of life, which is to him a sham and a lie. The hard military experience of the twentieth century has proved what Mr. Shaw perceived nearly thirty years ago, that fighting is no longer the spectacular game of dressed up warriors inspired by a warm glow of chivalry, but a practical affair in which brains, logic and business organization win the day. Captain Bluntschli, in *Arms and the Man*, embodies these qualities. He is a clever professional man, this Swiss soldier. He symbolizes the negation of the old romantic ideal of bravery in his belief that the first need of a soldier is an adequate supply of chocolate. Useless Don Quixotes like Sergius, with his "flashing eyes and lovely moustache," believe that the

soldier's duty is to shout a war-cry and charge at windmills. But in the end even Sergius learns from hard facts that war has ceased to need such men as him.

> *Sergius.* I am no longer a soldier. Soldiering, my dear madam, is the coward's art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong, and keeping out of harm's way when you are weak. That is the whole secret of successful fighting. Get your enemy at a disadvantage; and never, on any account, fight him on equal terms.

The warning was not however sufficient, and it needed cruel casualty lists in 1914 to drive this truth into the heads of the British army. Finally we learned the wisdom of disguising officers as common soldiers.

The fact is that the day of the romantic hero has passed and war has developed into the affair of business men. As the world worshipped the type of Major Sergius Saranoff, so it believed in the great Hero Napoleon. In *The Man of Destiny* (1897), a one act dialogue in which Bonaparte plays the leading rôle, Mr. Shaw painted the Hero as plain General Bonaparte, who has attained his rank not on account of overwhelming genius but by a process of circumstantial elimination. The great man is stripped of his glamour and shown as a man, much less of a fool than his contemporaries, but in the circumstances scarcely able to do less than he did. "On the whole, with his foe handicapped by Austrian statesmanship, classic generalship, and the exigencies of the aristocratic social structure of Viennese society, Napoleon finds it possible to be irresistible without working heroic miracles." The world, incapable of conceiving anyone doing what he did without being a miracle-working hero, has set up a romantic figure on a pedestal far above humanity. Mr. Shaw aimed at showing that after all he was a man, and he created this short episode as an illustration.

The same realistic method is applied in Mr. Shaw's other historical plays. The conventional treatment of historical characters had resulted in idealization which had been carried often to the length of absurdity. When Mr. Shaw depicts Cæsar and Cleopatra and their entourages he strips off all the trappings of romance. He plucks away the

imperial robe and the regal mantle and exposes kings and queens to the common gaze in sark and shift. In order to impress on us how ordinary such great ones really were Mr. Shaw conveys his historical plays in a medium of modernity. When Cæsar and Cleopatra speak they drop into the most familiar idiom of to-day. This method helps him to show how silly and naughty and petty the queens of romance may be and what a large element of ordinary humanity goes to the constitution of a Cæsar. The same device is used in *Androcles and the Lion*. We are aware that the play is set in ancient Rome, but we are never allowed to forget that the littleness and frailty of twentieth century society were just as common in the spacious days of imperial greatness.

It would be impossible to cite every sham conventional figure which Mr. Shaw demolished, but it would be equally impossible to pass over his complete demolition of the traditional stage Irishman. This puppet had strutted the stage for the delectation of many generations of English theatregoers who did not know Ireland ; and he is introduced once more in *John Bull's Other Island* (1904) in the form of Tim Haffigan. Knowing what is expected of him, Haffigan, in reality a drunken off-scouring of the lowest element of Glasgow, is glib with his " begorra." Every friend is a " broth of a boy," and he never forgets to play up to his English dupe with a " more power to your elbow " and a wish that " may your shadow never grow smaller." He succeeds easily in imposing on Broadbent, a typical Englishman ; but faced by Larry Doyle, a real Irishman, the wretched Haffigan is a patent sham. The bladder is pricked by one touch of reality and truth, and the perfect Irishman relapses into his low native Glasgow tongue.

Mr. Shaw was no less of an iconoclast in the matter of play construction than in the case of his characters. But for a few exceptions in the early plays he abandons the device of asides and soliloquies which had been accepted stage conventions for centuries. So much do these tricks offend him that when he wants to make use of soliloquy in *John Bull's Other Island* he masks it by introducing a grasshopper to

serve the purpose of interlocutor. He has no respect for the stage carpentry of *la pièce bien faite*. From the beginning of his career as dramatist he has always supported his plays on a structure of ideas rather than of incident or even of character. *Man and Superman* was called a " play of ideas." The consequence of this predilection is that speeches are often of overwhelming length, and scenes become mere discussions. Mr. Shaw himself has rightly called the third act of *Man and Superman* " a Shavio-Socratic dialogue." The same description applies equally well to the whole of *Getting Married*. Mr. Shaw is not really seriously concerned with plot so long as he has a story good enough to serve as a setting for his idea-propagating characters. With the supersession of incident by ideas there will naturally be few dramatic situations. Dénouement will be scarcely necessary and a play may have no definite ending. *John Bull's Other Island* ceases but it can hardly be said to end. Much less does one look for the romantic discoveries which are the frequent trick of the orthodox dramatist. *Fanny's First Play* ends in this fashion, but (like the grotesque ending of *The Importance of Being Earnest*) the discovery that Juggins, the manservant, is really a duke's brother is pure burlesque.

Although Mr. Shaw condemns stage carpentry of the Victorian kind he is not a slipshod artificer. He works on a different dramatic principle. Despite all the discredit which has overtaken the three time-worn dramatic unities no one has ever seriously disputed the necessity of unity of a play as a whole. The discussion has usually been concerned with the means of attaining unity. Mr. Shaw's practice shows that he cares little or naught for the three unities as such, though no English drama has conformed more rigidly than *Getting Married* to the unities of time, place and action. It would be hard to find any English play (*Samson Agonistes* excepted) which is nearer to the Greek in structure, including the long speeches. On the other hand has any dramatist cared less for the unities of time and place than the maker of *Back to Methusaleh?* After a pleasant prelude in the Garden of Eden the imagination takes wing over half a

dozen thousand years and comes to rest near Hampstead Heath. After dallying in the British Isles for ten centuries more, the dramatist rings down the curtain nowhere in particular on a summer afternoon in the year 31,920 A.D. Nor will it serve to argue that we are here concerned with more than one play. It might be arguable that they are not intended to be a play at all, but, whatever they are, each part would have little meaning by itself. There is a unity, but it is a unity of thought—of philosophy.

CHAPTER VII

SHAW THE ICONOCLAST (*continued*)

2. *Social Iconoclast*

For the sake of clarity it is well to make a distinction between Mr. Shaw's iconoclasm as it was directed against stage conventions and against conventions of thought and conduct. Yet the distinction is perhaps false at bottom, because these very stage conventions were really based on the conditions and outlook of society. We shall consequently be obliged to re-examine the same ground to some extent, though the approach will be from a different direction.

Mr. Shaw has always been a student of economic questions and these have inspired many of his plays. In his first play, *Widowers' Houses* (1892), he takes up the case of slum property. Sartorius is an owner of town tenements from which he has extracted the riches which in their turn are devoted to housing, clothing and educating his daughter according to all the rules of refinement and nineteenth century culture. Trench, a professional man who thinks he can afford to object to a dowry springing from such a source, discovers that his own fortune is rooted in precisely the same dunghill. So complicated is the evil of the present economic system that the noblest philanthropist may find himself similarly trapped. Sartorius is too rich a gentleman to collect his own rack-rent : he employs Lickcheese, a poor wretch who realizes that if he does not grind the faces of the poor for his master he will lose his job and see his own children starving. He does get the sack, but he thrives.

He himself rises to the highest prosperity, having learned how to extract riches not only from the squalid houses of the poor but from the pockets of the ratepayers. The ironical conclusion is a conspiracy between Lickcheese, Sartorius and Trench to extort compensation from the authorities who are planning a new street near certain slum property. Even Trench, whose scruples as to the origin of Sartorius's money had lost him a wife, finds his own affairs so inextricably linked with slum landlordism that he is drawn into the game of pillage. That he should eventually win Blanche only crowns the irony.

Reverend James Morell, Christian Socialist, in *Candida*, is another individual fighting hopefully but in vain against the forces of our economic system. Mr. Shaw symbolizes the terrific strength of the opposition to such men as Morell in the fact that his wife, Candida, is the daughter of a tradesman of the type of Burgess. Burgess, typifying a certain large class, is a coarse old humbug who will use any means to obtain influence whereby he may get contracts. By sweating his employees he is able to put in attractively low tenders.

Both Trench and James Morell are examples of men of high ideals. Morell is weakened by his own self-satisfaction: the enemy lurks within his own breast. Trench is defeated by the system in which he finds himself enmeshed. *Major Barbara* shows again the impossibility for the idealist to shake off the shackles of the economic system. A girl of pure intention may devote her life to raising the outcast and the downtrodden, but in the end she must stand or fall by accepting or refusing the support of the man who traffics in the very lifeblood of the folk she strives to elevate.

It is useless to sentimentalize over the beauty of poverty and the honesty of the respectable poor. Mr. Shaw sees that poverty is altogether foul, a running sore of society. The super-capitalist, Andrew Undershaft, has vision clear enough to see the evils of poverty. Blanche Sartorius hated it because it offended her refinement and cultivated senses: Burgess gave a living wage when he found that it paid: but

Undershaft is acute enough to see how foul a disease poverty is. He shocks the mild, philanthropic Cusins by describing it as the "worst of crimes." "Poverty," he says, "blights whole cities; spreads horrible pestilences; strikes dead the very souls of all who come within sight, sound or smell of it. What you call crime is nothing . . . there are not fifty genuine professional criminals in London. But there are millions of poor people, abject people, dirty people, ill fed, ill clothed people. They poison us morally and physically: they kill the happiness of society." This was indeed a cold douche of clear fact for the sentimentalists, and in true Shavian fashion it is a millionaire armament manufacturer who administers it.

Militarism is another social and political problem on which Mr. Shaw has a good deal to say. We have already seen the ridicule with which he invested the old soldier of romance in *Arms and the Man* and the attempt in *The Man of Destiny* so to strip the hero as to show him clearly as the man he really is. In *The Devil's Disciple* the question of militarism is less essentially part of the play. The dramatist is concerned with vital, basic qualities of soul, but the soldiers, if no more, give opportunity for comic situation and relief. In Major Swindon the narrow-minded fussiness of a certain military type is satirized. The witty General Burgoyne, with far too much sense of humour to belong to the "right type" of soldier, is a most successful foil to Major Swindon, who sputters and splutters at anything which is too original for him to comprehend. The War Office has now been played out as a source of jokes, but it was not altogether trite for an eighteenth century general, in a play written years before the Great War, to urge Major Swindon ("who is fuming"):

> Take it quietly, Major Swindon: your friend the British soldier can stand up to anything except the British War Office.

This was cheerful joking, though the jest covered much earnestness. But in *Major Barbara* Mr. Shaw tackled the question of militarism and war seriously from the economic

side. Who make wars and hurl people against people? Is it the people themselves, or their elected rulers? Perhaps they are not blameless, especially for equipping their international diplomatic machinery with men who have learned nothing and forgotten nothing for a century or so. Armies and navies are like mainsprings wound up to breaking-point and finding relaxation only in the escapement of war; but the individuals who stand to gain most in a material sense from war are the makers of armaments. They may, like Undershaft, be men passing as philanthropic, charitable gentlemen, ready to subsidize a Salvation Army which will march against poverty and social disease; but Undershaft confesses that what puts him into an especially good humour is to discover the secret of making a weapon which with one shell can demolish twenty-seven instead of thirteen human beings. If he is a liberal donor to social reform it is because a man of such vitality as his loathes inefficiency and waste, and sees that poverty is inefficient and wasteful. "To be wealthy," says Undershaft, "is with me a point of honour for which I am prepared to kill at the risk of my own life." [1] His religion is a cult of hypertrophic individualism, and it implies scorn of all sentimentality:

> . . . your Christmas card moralities of peace on earth and goodwill among men are of no use to me. Your Christianity, which enjoins you to resist evil, and to turn the other cheek, would make me a bankrupt. My morality—my religion—must have a place for cannons and torpedoes in it.

It does not follow that all armament manufacturers hold such a philosophy. Probably most of them have none at all. The majority are doubtless satisfied with attending more or less regularly at a church or chapel and giving appropriately large subscriptions to charitable funds. What Mr. Shaw demonstrates is that if they honestly face the facts they can hold no other philosophy than Undershaft's.

The worst of it is that these are the men who belong to the real governing class. There is a belief that the people

[1] Preface to *Major Barbara*, p. 157.

appoint their own rulers by means of the ballot box. Undershaft knows better :

> The government of your country ! *I* am the government of your country : I, and Lazarus. Do you suppose that you and half a dozen amateurs like you, sitting in a row in that foolish gabble shop, can govern Undershaft and Lazarus ? No my friend : you will do what pays *us*. You will make war when it suits us and keep peace when it doesn't. You will find out that trade requires certain measures when we have decided on those measures. When I want anything to keep my dividends up, you will discover that my want is a national need.

In a post-war edition of the play he might add, " And when war brings Europe rattling about our ears, a panic-stricken people rewards me with orders and titles commensurate with my profits ; and appoints me a member of a committee of the League of Nations to consider the possibilities of a general reduction of armaments."

Another theme which has stirred Mr. Shaw to the fray is the theory and practice of medicine. In *The Philanderer* he makes fun of the tragedy of Dr. Paramore's professional career. This eminent scientist has discovered a liver disease all his own from which Craven is suffering. The doctor fails to appreciate the joy shown by Craven when it is finally proved that his fatal disease is non-existent. But he does not blame Craven : he is enough of a philosopher to know that " all invalids are selfish." Four big specialists figure in *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906) and the play consists largely of uninteresting ridicule of their various theories. The preface to the play is a good deal more interesting : it expresses very explicitly Mr. Shaw's opposition to various modern medical theories. Amongst other things he disbelieves entirely, on scientific grounds, in vaccination. Part of his antagonism to orthodox medical science may be attributed to his detestation of vivisection. He returns to this theme again and again. The main ostensible reason of his objection is its futility. He cites cases where foolish men have carried out on living animals experiments which are both cruel and absurd. No one would disagree as to the unjustifiability of making animals suffer by unnecessary

experiments. Mr. Shaw will not easily persuade the world that vivisection is scientifically useless, but certainly only the callously cruel would seek to justify vivisection if it implies useless pain. But whether or not vivisection is useless, Mr. Shaw would on no grounds countenance the deliberate infliction of pain on animals. His keen sympathy with animals is expressed in more than one of his plays, but nowhere so explicitly as in the character of Androcles [1] who loved all beasts, and who, by sympathy and kindness, could tame even a lion and thereby save his own life.

Although Mr. Shaw's work is closely in touch with modern conditions, he has written few plays which can definitely be called political. *Press Cuttings* (1909) was a topical squib on contemporary party politics at the expense of the leading political figures of the day. *John Bull's Other Island* (1904) was a more considerable contribution to political drama. In the first place it administered a strong dose of tonic realism to Liberal humanitarianism. Broadbent is an absurd caricature: Mr. Shaw himself was forced to admit in the preface that as an English type he was out of date. The play aims at showing Irishmen their own weakness and the virtues of an Englishman, but still more at showing the English their own weakness and the virtues of the Irish. The fact is the English have given Ireland centuries of misgovernment as a result of misapprehension of the Irish mentality and ideals. Mr. Shaw emphasizes this crucial point in his preface to *O'Flaherty, V.C.* (1920) where he remarks on the grotesque methods employed by the English authorities to recruit Irishmen for the British Army. They failed to appreciate the fact that "the Irish were for the most part Roman Catholics and loyal Irishmen, which means that from the English point of view they were heretics and rebels." With fine disdain of the Irish point of view they proceeded to adopt methods which by reason of their unimaginativeness proved futile. In *John Bull's Other Island* Mr. Shaw shows how the blessing of misgovernment

[1] In *Androcles and the Lion.*

was not made more palatable to Irish taste by a thick coating of sentimentalism, and he suggests that England should withdraw both. Further, he lays stress on the fact that England has quite enough on her hands at home, and that if she would leave Ireland alone she might have more time and energy to devote to cleaning her own back yard. As Hodson, the cockney servant, expresses it very fitly and with characteristic altruism :

> I'm a Owm Ruler, I am. Do you know why ? . . . It's because I want a little attention paid to my own country : and thetll never be as long as your chaps are ollerin at Wesmister as if nowbody mettered but your own bloomin selves. Send me back to hell or C'naught, as good oul English Cromwell said. I'm just sick of Ireland. Let it gow. Cut the cable. Make it a present to Germany to keep the oul Kyzer busy for a while ; and give poor ould England a chawnce : that's wot *I* say.

More recently Mr. Shaw has crystallized his views in the remark that " Home Rule for England is my hobby."

Mr. Shaw is always interested in the question of woman's status and her relation to man ; consequently he is much concerned with the institution of marriage and all the problems to which it gives rise. We have already seen how in the early plays Mr. Shaw creates heroines who embody the idea of independent womanhood. Vivie and the Craven girls represent the extremer type of female independence. Prossy, the private secretary, in *Candida*, is another example of the woman who is economically and intellectually independent. But the greatest creation of a woman's character in Mr. Shaw's early work (indeed in all his work) is Candida. Candida is not the ultra-feminist, nor the " strong-minded " spinster. Mr. Shaw is a sufficiently sound biologist and psychologist to know that it is as mate and mother that woman can best attain her full stature. Candida is a really good wife, a fully-developed woman : she towers above the Vivies and Cravens, as they tower above a Mrs. Warren. There is a fresh, expansive atmosphere around her. She is far above the old ideal of the good wife of Victorian convention. She realizes that for completion of her individuality she depends on her husband ; she does not seek or need

independence because she realizes that independence would spell isolation, incompleteness. Yet her dependence implies no inferiority : it is the dependence of love and comradeship. Her vision is clear and her Jove need not appear to her in cloud of gold. If there is a rock in the way it is the egoism of James Morell, who for a moment of very natural anger with young Marchbanks mounts the high horse of marital authority and appeals to the proprieties and the stale notions of a husband's rights. Eugene Marchbanks taunts Morell that he dare not leave Candida free choice between them. It is the same dramatic device as that on which Ibsen rested his *Lady from the Sea*, but without the convincing and impressive setting of Ibsen's play. Morell, like Doctor Wangel, consents to dismount from the high horse and stand on the ground and on one side, to leave his wife perfect freedom. As soon as he does this it is clear that she has no freedom of choice. Gripped by her own womanhood, Candida, the true mother, must give herself to the man who is weakest, who most needs her protection. This surely is the sentimental, puny poet, Marchbanks. Morell, conscious of his own strength, offers her his manly support. " I have nothing to offer you," he explains with all the proper sense of responsibility as guardian of the weaker vessel, " but my strength for your defence, my honesty of purpose for your surety, my ability and industry for your livelihood, and my authority and position for your dignity." When she announces her fateful decision, " I give myself to the weaker of the two," her husband realizes that he has lost her for ever ; but he promised to give her freedom of choice and he will accept the verdict with tragic calm. But the comic muse has been playing tricks behind the mask of tragedy and his joy is not unmixed with discomfiture when he learns that the choice has fallen on himself.

A woman of Candida's quality and worth has pity and even sympathy for Marchbanks, but her good sense and rich humanity raise her far above his sentimental, amorous vapouring. His fanciful love moves in the roseate clouds of fairyland. Her womanhood gives her a grip on

actuality. It shocks his romantic soul to see her busy in her home.

> No, not a scrubbing brush, but a boat—a tiny shallop to sail away in, far from the world, where the marble floors are washed by the rain and dried by the sun, where the south wind dusts the beautiful green and purple carpets. Or a chariot—to carry us up into the sky, where the lamps are stars, and don't need to be filled with paraffin oil every day.

Candida is too busy with preparations for dinner to pay much attention, but all the mother rises in her breast, and filled with fine pity she comforts him by letting him slice the onions. Mrs. Morell is too clear-eyed a woman and too happily married to be dazzled by Joveling's shower of brass filings. It is evident that she would never have served as the adulterous heroine of certain dramatists. The fact was that she had too much to do in the kitchen and her bank account was not filled to sufficient superfluity. Indeed she was too natural, too strong, too independent.

In *Getting Married* (1908) Mr. Shaw made his chief comment on the problems of marriage and divorce. In *Candida* he had dealt with the question from the human aspect: in this lengthy symposium he thrashes out the practical details of the marriage contract from the social, legal and ecclesiastical points of view. He exposes many of the anomalies, absurdities and tragedies involved in the present system. Together with the preface the play is a valuable commentary on the findings of the Divorce Commission. Superficially there is fun and comedy; but sincerity and earnestness are there too. Sykes, the bridegroom, has just made a discovery of one of the absurdities of the marriage contract:

> Yes, but I didnt know that when we were married I should be legally responsible if she libelled anybody, though all her property is protected against me as if I were the lowest thief and cadger.

Similarly Edith discovers things. The grievances are not all on the husband's side.

> She got married. When she had three children—the eldest only four years old—her husband committed a murder, and then attempted to commit suicide, but only succeeded in disfiguring himself. Instead of hanging him, they sent him to penal

> servitude for life, for the sake, they said, of his wife and infant children. And she could not get a divorce from that horrible murderer.

So they set to work to draw up a more reasonable and suitable marriage contract in place of the present one. There is much debate but little positive result. Amongst all the theorists the practically-minded Collins, the waiter, is perhaps as near the truth as any:

> Marriage is tolerable enough in its way if youre easygoing and dont expect too much from it. But it doesnt bear thinking about. The great thing is to get the young people tied up before they know what theyre letting themselves in for.

He also points out wisely that there are so many motives immediately prompting marriage that in order to please them all "Why, youll want half a dozen different sorts of contract." Whilst the elders are arguing and wrangling Nature steps in and the young couple sneak off and get married on the quiet.

Mr. Shaw sees with open eye the absurdity and the cruelty which hedge round the modern English institution of marriage, but he shows that Nature in a community like ours will impel the majority of young people into monogamic mating, and that until we have reformed our system the Life Force will drive them to accept it as it stands. But this does not imply that reform is unnecessary. Framed on lines which may have suited an age which had not reached our present stage of development our marriage institution is to-day out of date. It clashes with the modern view of the social and economic position of women, and, what is worst of all, it is ceasing to function as an efficient means of carrying out its ostensible purpose (*vide The Book of Common Prayer*) of facilitating procreation and thereby perpetuating the human race.

The ideal of freedom, the right and necessity for the individual to self-expression and development along the lines of his or her own personality, is the spring of many of the ideas of Mr. Shaw which we have examined. The influence of later nineteenth century thought from many sides

converged on this general principle. It is to be seen in the naturalism of Walt Whitman, it inspired the revolt of Ibsen against tyrannous convention, it is at the root of the Nietzschean doctrine of the superman, in a sense it resides in the biological doctrine of individuation elaborated by Herbert Spencer. It is moreover a condition of the doctrine of a modern socialist like Mr. Shaw. The older liberal doctrine of individualism had meant the liberty of the individual, who was strong enough, to assert and exercise his freedom at the expense of the community. Socialism implies an opposite and perhaps equally great danger, and it will defeat its own end unless it realizes, as it largely does, that the individual and the community are two aspects of human life neither of which can be allowed to flourish at the expense of the other without danger to the race.

Mr. Shaw is fully aware of this truth—a truth elementary but obscured in the minds of many—and it is therefore not inconsistent that he the socialist should preach a crusade against the communal tyranny of the domestic hearth. He heads the league of youth which rebels against the dominance of family conservatism. The parents, themselves perhaps rebels in their youth, have acquired a settled conviction as to the fitness of things as established by their generation; and, unable through lack of imagination to perceive the inevitable flux of ideas and ideals, they deprive their children of the right to self-expression for which they in youth may have made so many sacrifices. Vivie is a type of the daughter who tears aside the veil of romanticism in which her mother has draped her wicked self. She embodies the right of the younger generation to live according to its own lights. Sylvia and Julia Craven represent the younger generation and its ideals, and what is more they show how ridiculous self-expression may be when carried to excess; but not more ridiculous than the attempt of the old generation to follow them in their mad career.

You Never Can Tell is a more subtle treatment of the same theme. It expresses the demand of the younger generation for self-expression and the absurd futility of parents who

coddle their children, even on the most enlightened and liberal lines. The youngsters may behave in an exceedingly grotesque and outrageous fashion; but learners are necessarily awkward. None of us has learned to skate, or even to walk, without cutting a most ludicrous figure. Floundering is part of the educational process. A helping hand or even the support of a chair may be of assistance, but each must learn for himself. Such seems to be the purport of this play. Mrs. Clandon is painfully up-to-date in her educational method correctly framed on a basis of freedom for the young. It fails ridiculously, chiefly because no system which depends mainly on the educator, which is imposed from without by a directive adult personality, can end in aught but failure.

Lady Britomart (in *Major Barbara*) might be Mrs. Clandon's sister. She thinks she is an advanced educationist, but her wholly erroneous theory and more peccant practice are revealed quite naïvely to her son. Stephen begs to be treated as a man, and with unfeigned indignation she protests:

> Treat you as a child! . . . You must know I have never treated any of you as children. I have always made of you my companions and friends, and allowed you perfect freedom to do and say whatever you liked, so long as you liked what I could approve of.

She is a caricature, but not an unfair representation of the masterful lady who firmly believes in her liberal views and love of freedom for all, so long as everybody concurs with the views and prejudices which are imbedded fast in the immovable concrete of her own rigid conservatism.

It is in *Misalliance* that Mr. Shaw has put his later views on the domestic question. The play deals with the problem with some fullness, and it is reinforced as a pamphlet by a very lengthy preface expressly devoted to the relations of parents and children. Perhaps the main point which he wishes to push home is the impossibility of a complete understanding between different generations. The fact is that by the time we are old and are parents the ideals and outlook which have become the setting of our thoughts and

lives are out of date. The Victorian parent had been brought up to certain notions as to propriety in female conduct. The Georgian girl has a new outlook. She lives in an age when young women do not believe in the necessity of the decorum which fenced in their mothers in their youth. They are not content to spend their time on useless fancy work and second-rate piano-playing. The result is that if parents still hold to their old ideas the domestic circle is a place of intolerable boredom. For what is boredom but lack of opportunity to stretch the wings and try a flight? It is far more boring to cool your heels than to break your neck. For uncounted generations the fully vital male has preferred to live dangerously. The woman of the twentieth century insists on a similar privilege. In the past women found danger only in maternity. It is a sign of human progress that to-day they demand it on lines of individual development. Their mothers had probably strained at the bars in their own way, but whether or not they had succeeded in getting out they had not remembered the lesson. Mrs. Clandon and Lady Britomart had certainly been young rebels: but rebels often make superb tyrants. It is boredom which is the bane of Hypatia's life in *Misalliance*. She lets out the horrid secret to old Lord Summerhays who in making love to her at any rate provides a change from the "talk, talk, talk, talk" which besets her from morning to night.

> All the day I listen to mamma talking; at dinner I listen to papa talking; and when papa stops for breath I listen to Johnny talking . . .
>
> If parents would only realize how they bore their children! Three or four times in the last half hour Ive been on the point of screaming.
>
> *Lord Summerhays.* Were we very dull?
>
> *Hypatia.* Not at all: you were very clever. Thats whats so very hard to bear, because it makes it so difficult to avoid listening. You see, I'm young; and I do so want something to happen. My mother tells me that when I'm her age, I shall be only too glad that nothing's happened; but I'm not her age; so what good is that to me? Theres my father in the garden, meditating on his destiny. All very well for him: hes had a destiny to meditate on; but I havnt had any destiny yet. Everything's happened to him: nothing's happened to me. Thats why this unending talk is so maddeningly uninteresting to me.

Mr. Shaw perceived one of the real causes of the revolt of women. For them it was especially and intensely boring to be held in the protective embrace of the iron arms of parenthood. The same thing occurs to boys, but the fight for male emancipation from parental apron strings has been largely won. At any rate Mr. Shaw is less concerned on their behalf and he has left it to other dramatists to wage their battle. We shall see later that this is a dominant note in the work of such a writer as Stanley Houghton.

We have examined certain particular social and human problems which Mr. Shaw has attacked in his peculiar iconoclastic fashion. But as morality and religion are fundamental human questions, Mr. Shaw's commentary on these subjects is in the tissue of almost all his work. Mr. Shaw is primarily a rationalist: he is a man who wishes to drag every human value to the bar of reason. This is not to agree with the one-eyed critics who think that Mr. Shaw has no capacity for sentiment and those other human qualities which we call spiritual, or that he disbelieves in anything which cold logic cannot encompass. What he will not do, however, is to remain satisfied with beliefs and dogmas and conventions without testing them to the limits of his intellectual ability.

The trouble is that the majority of us will not exercise our intellect. We will not or cannot look at the matter calmly and rationally. We are too ignorant or too lazy to trouble over conduct when there is a ready-made conventional creed which provides for all our social needs. Religion is ready-made and we accept it. Good form supplies us with the rest. We all know if "it is done," and we do it. If "it is not done" we avoid it as if it were the foulest disease or the most degrading crime. The fact is that inertia of the mind, coupled with the diversion of energy into the material struggle for life, induces us to save trouble wherever we can. Mankind has crystallized his moral and religious practice in the adage, "Let sleeping dogs lie."

Mr. Shaw, not content to be overcome by mental inertia, has stirred these same dogs with a stick and finds that they

sometimes lie most egregiously. His plays are almost all expositions of one sort of lie or another. *Fanny's First Play* (1911) is a searching scrutiny of the bases of our morality. Mrs. Knox is one of the ladies who is shaken out of her moral inertia. At first she is dazzled by the light of Mr. Shaw's intellectual bull's-eye, but after a little blinking she begins to see things as they are. Thus she expresses her disillusion :

> we're ignorant. We don't really know whats right and whats wrong. We're all right as long as things go on the way they always did. We bring our children up just as we were brought up ; and we go to church or chapel just as our parents did ; and we say what everybody says ; and it goes on all right until something out of the way happens : . . . We find out then that with all our respectability and piety, weve no real religion and no way of telling right from wrong. Weve nothing but our habits ; and when theyre upset, where are we ?

It would be tedious to cite all the plays in which Mr. Shaw strives to force humanity to examine and think for itself. The fact is that there is too little religion in life and too much religiosity. Mr. Shaw wants to shake us out of the mental lethargy in which we escape from the great, fundamental religious questions. We are too apt to feel like Mrs. Knox that religion is an unpleasantly intimate affair. " Talk about something else. No good ever comes of arguing about such things among the like of us." That is just why " the like of us " are satisfied with convention instead of building morality and religion securely on a foundation of thought.

The question of Mr. Shaw's treatment of religious matters is more important as a constructive contribution to life, and as such we shall revert to it later. But it was as a destructive critic that he first dealt with religion. In *The Devil's Disciple* (1897) and *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* (1909) Mr. Shaw attacks false religion. In the earlier play it is not the servant of the devil who is the really bad man. Like Blanco and Feemy Evans in the later play he is the social outcast, the despised and rejected of men ; but there is more real religion in these naughty people than in all the tight-lipped, girt-up lispers of creeds. It is, moreover, these

so-called religious people who are often the real enemies of religion. It is a notorious fact that none are so irreligious as those who in youth are overdosed with church and chapel, with psalm singing and prayer meetings. A small dose of medicine may be an excellent tonic : a large dose will kill. As Tarleton puts it in *Misalliance* :

> I was kept away from the Bible for forty years by being told to read it when I was young. Then I picked it up one evening in a hotel in Sunderland when I had left all my papers in the train ; and I found it wasnt half bad.

The real trouble with much of our present-day religion is that it is nothing more than a casing, a pasteboard armour, which we don to protect ourselves from the slings and arrows of the outrageous people who think for themselves. We naturally regard original thinkers as dangerous rebels. They often are in fact extremely silly and vexatious people, and so we prefer those whose thoughts do not contravene the normal conventional ideas to which we are used. This is the theme of *Androcles and the Lion* in which the Christian would-be martyrs are nothing more nor less than modern cranks, that is, people whose thoughts and beliefs run off the orthodox lines. Rome cast these ridiculously unconventional Christians to their heathen lions. We have nice, Christian lions for the benefit of atheists, bolsheviks and other absurd people, such as those who are too consistently Christian to kill even Germans.

It is not for want of telling that we English still fail to appreciate the shallowness of our respectability. Foreigners have seen it for long, and one of the reasons why they appreciate Byron is doubtless because he saw the humbug and said so. In the generations that followed Byron's day English respectability became more and more firmly entrenched, but Mr. Shaw was determined to pound down the parapet if he could. His keen, cold vision pierced through the wrappings in which we had encased ourselves and he saw us dying for lack of air and freedom of action. A man of lively energy, he wants to see others able to use all their faculties, and he perceived that we were hampering and stunting ourselves

by our elaborate integument of conventions. "I hate to see dead people walking about:" he says in the preface to *Fanny's First Play*, "it is unnatural. And our respectable middle class people are all dead as mutton."

To recognize the falsity of certain human conventions is not to condemn all. The energy of life needs artificial means of conservation and not the least important of these means is conventional rule. Without such limitations human conduct would fly in all directions and the result would be the ultimate destruction of social cohesion. The real danger is that we allow our conventions to survive their term of usefulness. Mr. Shaw is so much concerned with criticizing outworn conventions that he lays little stress on the true. At the same time there is no evidence that he does not appreciate the necessity and value of convention, so long as it is the servant and not the master of society, and may be dismissed if the time comes when it is a hindrance and not a help to human progress.

CHAPTER VIII

SHAW THE PHILOSOPHER

In an early preface Mr. Shaw confessed, " I have, I think, always been a Puritan in my attitude towards Art." This seems paradoxical only to those who associate with puritanism the idea of rigid conventional morality and religion. The essence of puritanism is intellectualism, an overmastering earnestness which logically probes dogmas and dissects institutions with the scalpel of reason, which loves consistency even maybe to the limits of fanaticism, and which consequently refuses to be blinded by the glare of sensuousness. Hence the puritan is an idealist, though perhaps an impossibilist, because his logical mind sees things as they should be rather than as they are, and acts accordingly. In terms of modern psychology he has sublimated his more primitive complexes into the moral earnestness of a stern liver and a zealous reformer. False puritanism, on the other hand, is rooted in timidity. It is the refuge of those who are afraid to face the sensuous facts of human life and live behind the rigid barriers of conventions, taboos and other devices for smothering human animalism. If there is any meaning in purity it is a quality of upward development, and it is intellect which urges man along that path. So that the true puritan is one who leads humanity starwards, whilst the false puritan, goody-goody and afraid of life and beauty, entrenched behind his humbug and cant of timid respectability, really keeps man wallowing in the mire.

We have reviewed at some length various social sores to which Mr. Shaw has applied the cautery of his keen and

critical intellect. His treatment seems ruthless; but if he is unperturbed by the screams of the sufferer it is because his pity is really intense and his optimism great. A callous or pessimistic surgeon may hesitate to inflict curative pain; but not he who desires to heal and believes in his remedy. Mr. Shaw has unlimited faith in the healing properties of truth; so he strips off all the shams and humbug with which society hides its sores. One of the most specious of these poor coverings—though often it seems to be a gay garment—is sentimentalism. He tears it away relentlessly and in doing so he seems to banish true sentiment. But in fact he recognizes and, where he recognizes it, he extols real sentiment. It is true that his intellect is quick to detect the slightest fraud, and what seems to be natural passion to most may to him be an absurdity to be destroyed in his acid bath. He realizes that sentiment is a proper element in human nature; but he believes that it is by the agency of reason that man is enabled to climb to higher stages.

An example is to be found in the passion of revenge which is often, as Mr. Shaw shows, utterly irrational and absurd. Captain Brassbound is obsessed with the desire for revenge on his uncle. He the outcast has been driven by circumstances, working on a passionate nature, to open brigandage. His uncle, Sir Howard Hallam, a man of brains and substance, one of Her Majesty's judges, is the object of his hate. Captain Brassbound's conversion consists essentially in the dawn of reason in a soul which had previously been lighted only by the glare of passion. The light irradiates his nature until he can see clearly enough to follow a rational course and he makes his convert's confession:

> My uncle is no worse a man than myself—better, most likely; for he has a better head and a higher place. Well, I took him for a villain out of a storybook. My mother would have opened anybody else's eyes: she shut mine. I'm a stupider man than Brandyfaced Jack even; for he got his romantic nonsense out of his penny numbers and such like trash; but I got just the same nonsense out of life and experience. It was vulgar—*vulgar*. I see that now; for youve opened my eyes to the past.

In similar fashion Mr. Shaw rends the heart from the convention of marital jealousy. Starting on the basis of false values we erect monstrous conventions of false feelings which at length we believe to be essential to human nature. In *How He Lied To Her Husband* he turns one of our commonest human passions inside out, rinses and soaps it in a bath of reason and hangs it out to dry in the fresh air of laughter. There may have been a sound basis for the instinctive belief in a husband's right to exercise his own justice on the man who robs him of his wife. The convention is certainly bred in our very bone to-day, as the criminal courts and the divorce laws bear witness. In this little play Mr. Shaw exhibits a husband angry with the other man not for robbing him of his wife's love, but because he does not love her, and delighted when he discovers his error and learns that the other man does love her after all.

In *Overruled* the theme is similar. In *Widowers' Houses* he examines paternal affection and finds it intimately bound up with avarice. Mrs. Warren's maternal affection springs from the soil of sordid vice, and her daughter, recognizing the fact, repudiates filial relations with the woman whom her intellect bids her loathe and shun. The fine sentiments of Dr. Trench (in *Widowers' Houses*) crumble under the pressure of brutal fact and cruel circumstance. Selfishness is left victorious amidst the ruins of his noble emotions. In *The Philanderer* the high aims of the medical scientist are shown to rest on unimaginative egoism and a brutal callousness to human suffering.

It is especially the dominant passion of sexual love which Mr. Shaw strips of its sentimental finery. He shows the false basis of the conventional romanticism of Sergius and Raina (in *Arms and the Man*) and Eugene Marchbank's passion for Candida, and the sham rationalism of the love of Paramore and Julia (*The Philanderer*). He realizes however that love is a real thing. If Valentine (in *You Never Can Tell*) woos Gloria with the cool precision of a dentist and if John Tanner and Ann are trapped into love despite themselves, it is not because Mr. Shaw disbelieves in true love. On the contrary

it is to him an overmastering element in human life : it is the means by which the Life Force urges the race to maintain itself and grow. It is in the highest sense real and sacred. For that reason he objects to the silly convention which disallows us from facing it honestly and dares only to show to the world a sentimental substitute.

There is no doubt of the reality of Mr. Shaw's own emotion of pity. Pity, acting on an intellectual plane, is perhaps the prime stimulus of his art. He exhibits at times " the ferocity which is still characteristic of bulls and other vegetarians." In the Plays Unpleasant it licks its victims with the fiery tongue of indignation. It is turned to the strident laughter of pain in *Androcles and the Lion,* whilst in *Heartbreak House* it rises to a terrifying scream, not laughter but the cachinnation of demons and demoniacs. We seem to hear from the dramatist himself the cry of Vivie who felt the horror of life so intensely that feeling had to be quelled and crushed out of her life.

Because Mr. Shaw's own deep feeling is masked by laughter, an obtuse public has come to regard him as only a mocker. He is consequently written down as cynical, a scoffer at religion, an unbeliever in all things spiritual. Again it is the mistake of thinking because a man laughs at the sham that he disdains the true. Mr. Shaw respects and venerates true religion no less than true love. It is the false god whose image he wishes to smash. He has given some very striking studies of spiritual experience, but our ideas on this subject are so painfully tortured by habit that we fail to recognize the picture. In *Pygmalion* (1913) Mr. Shaw has achieved one of his most brilliant pieces of characterization. Liza is not a stationary study : her character springs up and grows from the crude, harsh seed through all the processes of development until at last the flower bursts forth in all its fullness. Hence the dynamic quality of this play, which is one of Mr. Shaw's greatest creations. At first we see only the harsh exterior of this rough girl, but soon there are signs, visible to us at any rate, of latent qualities. Gradually she becomes conscious of the divine spark. In

Liza there springs up a tiny flame—a fire, a personality, a soul,—evoked by the compelling power of the sculptor-phonetician. The statue takes the breath of life, which sends the blood of passion coursing through her veins and fires her to anger with her artist master. When she flings the shoes in the face of Higgins our laughter is only momentary: we realize the solemnity of the event, for we are witnessing the birth pangs of a soul.

Mr. Shaw was not steeped in Bunyan in vain. He understands the overmastering passion of spiritual conversion. In *Major Barbara* he mocks at the sham, sentimental or bogus conversion, but he showed incidentally in *Man and Superman* that he knew the reality of the true kind. John Tanner had been converted in youth. He had undergone the same process as Liza Doolittle: there had come a moment when the wave of spirit had caught him in its powerful embrace, swept him off his feet and borne him out on to the sea of life.

> Up to that time I had played the boy buccaneer with no more conscience than a fox in a poultry farm. But I now began to have scruples, to feel obligations, to find that veracity and honor were no longer goody-goody expressions in the mouths of grown-up people, but compelling principles in myself . . . The change that came to me was the birth in me of moral passion . . . If it were not a passion—if it were not the mightiest of the passions, all the other passions would sweep it away like a leaf before a hurricane. It is the birth of that passion that turns a child into a man.

May we not catch here a glimpse of Mr. Shaw's own soul's history? John Tanner had been a destructive lad in his pre-moral boyhood: he had ruined no end of trees and cucumber frames. His soul-birth did not alter his nature: the upspringing of a moral sense concentrated and directed his energy.

> I am ten times more destructive now than I was then. The moral passion has taken my destructiveness in hand and directed it to moral ends. I have become a reformer, and, like all reformers, an iconoclast. I no longer break cucumber frames and burn gorse bushes: I shatter creeds and demolish idols.

Is it only John Tanner, or Mr. Shaw, who makes this confession?

The world does not connect religion with anything but creeds and conformity, so that it is often unrecognized in the queer places and uncouth habitations where Mr. Shaw displays it. We look for cucumbers in what seems to us the only fit and proper place. Disappointed we discover only empty frames and broken glass. Meantime Mr. Shaw is cultivating cucumbers in the sunshine and fresh air of the prairie or the back woods. They seem somewhat coarse gourds at first sight, but on tasting them we discover that they have a freshness and natural flavour unknown to the artificial, horticultural product.

Dick Dudgeon, the Devil's Disciple, is one of these. He is the son of a cruel, envious, soul-dried woman, professing religion which in her house is really dead.

> In such a home the young Puritan finds himself starved of religion, which is the most clamorous need of his nature. With all his mother's indomitable selfulness, but with Pity instead of Hatred as his master passion, he pities the devil; takes his side; and champions him, like a true Covenanter, against the world. He thus becomes, like all genuinely religious men, a reprobate and an outcast. [1]

Dick is a Shelleyan Prometheus, chained to a rock of torture by the god of false religion, tormented by the beak and claw of a cold, cruel, heartless, conventional respectability. Judged by the values of romantic drama Dick is the wicked hero, reclaimed by the love of a sentimental heroine. Nothing could be further from the truth, as Mr. Shaw has pointed out. Anderson, the rebel minister, is wanted by the military, who intend to make an example by hanging him. Circumstances enable Dick to substitute himself and save the minister. He does so and earns the passionate gratitude and love of Anderson's wife. He faces the military tribunal and their sentence of death without a tremor. Why does he behave thus? Is it bravado? No: he desires life too strongly. Is it overmastering love for Judith Anderson? No: this is at most a part of his motive. It is because in the minister's house for the first time he saw love and beauty in human life. "Dick looks round and understands the charm and

[1] *Plays for Puritans*, Preface, xxiv.

the peace and the sanctity," [1] and virtue enters into the man. It is his conversion : the latent is realized. Then he can do nothing but obey the undeniable call of his own nature : he is impelled by his own highest self to sacrifice his body for another.

The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet is an even more striking study of elemental, natural religion springing unbidden in the roughest soil. It is a crude and rugged community which Mr. Shaw depicts—the scarce civilized people of a far western American township. Even in that wild and desolate spot respectability and convention have their stronghold. The arrant humbug, Elder Daniels, a pillar of the church and a prop of righteousness, is the emblem of godliness in that far off town. Blanco, the blasphemous horse stealer, is laid by the heels, and Elder Daniels has his opportunity to expatiate on morality and religion. Thus he ends a long tirade :

> It ended in your becoming a rambler and a gambler : it is going to end this evening on the gallows tree. Oh, what a lesson against spiritual pride ! Oh, what a———

At this point Blanco's self-control breaks down and he throws his hat at him. Then addressing him by the irreverent name which refers to the former bibulous tendencies of the ostentatiously temperate Elder, he bursts out :

> Stow, it Boozy. Sling it. Cut it. Cheese it. Shut up. " Shake not the dying sinner's sand."
>
> *Elder Daniels.* Aye : there you go, with your scraps of lustful poetry.

But Blanco has the best of it when it comes to a tussle of morals :

> Dont deceive yourself, Boozy. You sell drink because you make a bigger profit out of it than you can by selling tea. And you gave up drink yourself because when you got that fit at Edwardstown the doctor told you youd die the next time ; and that frightened you off it.

Blanco was an avowed devil's disciple. He had been driven into irreligion, like Dick Dudgeon, by the harshly repressive quality of the religion which he had found about

[1] *Plays for Puritans*, Preface, xxvi.

him. It had been a creed of "Don't do this," "You mustn't do that" and "You'll go to Hell if you do the other," whilst he wanted in the exuberance of youth and health to live his own life. So he had cast in his lot against God and religion. But he was caught out at last. True religion gripped his heart unawares, and struggle as he would there was no more escape for him than there was for Dick Dudgeon. The divine spark had suddenly inflamed his rebellious spirit. He, the filthy talker, the vile liver, the profane blasphemer, the rebel against God and society, had been conquered like John Bunyan or Saul of Tarsus. Blanco had stolen a horse; but as he was making good his escape he had met a poor woman and her sick babe. This is her version of what happened:

> I took it [the horse] from a man that met me . . . The man looked a bad man. He cursed me; and he cursed the child: God forgive him! But something came over him. I was desperate. I put the child in his arms; and it got its little fingers down his neck and called him Daddy and tried to kiss him; for it was not right in its head with the fever. He said it was a little Judas kid, and that it was betraying him with a kiss, and that he'd swing for it. And then he gave me the horse, and went away crying and laughing and singing dreadful dirty wicked words to hymn tunes like as if he had seven devils in him.

Then comes the debauched trull, Feemy Evans, with her evidence against Blanco. But her crude, bestial lust to make him swing melts before the radiant beauty of the story of the little dead child. For the mother had related how help had been unavailing: croup had conquered child life. Feemy goes "softy": heaven "plays a trick" on her as it had on Blanco. Against her intention she gives evidence which saves Blanco's life.

Blanco, converted against his will, is still sceptical. He cannot reconcile his divine visitation with the death of the innocent child:

> Why did the child die? Tell me that if you can. He cant have wanted to kill the child. Why did He make me go soft on the child if He was going hard on it Himself? Why should He go hard on the innocent kid and go soft on a rotten thing like me?

Blanco has discovered his own soul, but he cannot rede the riddle of life. When the soul is born a man must face the ultimate facts of life. The convert's radiant joy is overcast by the problem of good and evil, happiness and pain. His vision and his soul's happiness are, however, real, and he frames his own rough creed :

> Yah ! What about the croup ? It was early days when He made the croup, I guess. It was the best He could think of then ; but when it turned out wrong on His hands He made you and me to fight the croup for him. You bet He didnt make us for nothing ; and He wouldnt have made us at all if He could have done His work without us. By Gum, that must be what we're for ! Hed never have made us to be rotten drunken blackguards like me, and good-for-nothing rips like Feemy. He made me because He had a job for me. He let me run loose til the job was ready ; and then I had to come along and do it, hanging or no hanging. And I tell you it didnt feel rotten : it felt *bully*, just bully. Anyhow, I got the rotten feel off me for a minute of my life ; and I'll go through fire to get it off me again.

Once again he bursts forth in his newly born fervour :

> No. No more paths. No more broad and narrow. No more good and bad. Theres no good and bad ; by Jiminy, gents, theres a rotten game, and theres a great game. I played the rotten game ; but the great game was played on me. Amen. Gentlemen : let us adjourn to the saloon. I stand the drinks.

This is religion, naked but unashamed—religion divested of all that is unessential. The play was banned by the Censor.

It is clear, therefore, that critics are wrong who aver that Mr. Shaw is only an iconoclast, that he cannot touch the deeper springs of human character, and that he has made no constructive contribution to life. It is true that many, in fact most, of his plays are concerned with the evils and absurdities of human life, which he attacks with all the power of his corrosive laughter. But this is not the whole truth. If we have ears to hear we can learn that Mr. Shaw has a very real, positive philosophy. To understand this it is necessary to study two particular plays in which he concentrates his constructive thought. His philosophy is interwoven with his whole work and many of the prefaces are valuable aids to understanding him. But twice Mr. Shaw has expressed

himself so clearly that we cannot misapprehend his lesson. Each time he has utilized a form which is scarcely dramatic, and has supplemented his pronouncement by a prefatory essay which clarifies and amplifies the thesis of the play. In his prime Mr. Shaw presented his views on human life in *Man and Superman* and now he has given his mature convictions in *Back to Methusaleh* (1921).

Mr. Shaw has an almost unequalled faculty for seizing the kernel of truth out of the thoughts of others. This is not to reduce him to a mere philosophic anthologist. He is a critic, and the highest functions of criticism need originality and the positive, creative mind. Mr. Shaw has studied the thought of the past century with care and perspicacity and in the light of modern philosophy he has formed his own conclusions. The two important elements in nineteenth century thought which are fundamental to Mr. Shaw's interpretation of life are the doctrines of Evolution and of Will. He accepts, as proved, the theory of evolutionary development by which species progress. This theory, seen dimly by eighteenth and early nineteenth century thinkers, has been established by the school founded by Charles Darwin. But he does not accept the explanation of this process which the Darwinians propounded under the name of Natural Selection. They believed that fortuitous circumstances occasioned certain individual characteristics which gave their possessors greater power to resist the pressure of environment, and thus assisted them in the struggle for existence. Nature then stepped in and tended to concentrate her efforts by perpetuating this type. Such a theory demands countless ages for the occurrence of the requisite lucky accidents and reduces life to a blind passiveness to casual circumstance. Mr. Shaw will not accept this theory of circumstantial selection, as he names it. Going back to the theory of Lamarck, a French biologist of a century ago, and amplifying it in the light of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Butler, he holds that the immediate cause of each change which marks an evolutionary stage is will. In the struggle for existence the species plays an active, though maybe an

unconscious, part. Urged by the instinct of self-preservation it seeks means of overcoming counteracting forces, and undergoes impalpable but real changes which enable it to give effect to those desires.

When we reach man the problem is to some extent complicated, but in another sense simplified, by his greater power to rationalize. William Godwin, and the philosophical anarchists of the revolutionary period, had placed such boundless confidence in human reason that they believed that the rational man working along individualist lines could effect almost abruptly the most profound changes in human conditions. Mr. Shaw, with the advantage over Godwin of the thought of a century, has raised the formative power of will from the plane of the individual to the plane of the race. Here he is following such thinkers as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche who amplified the speculations of Lamarck. Nietzsche's philosophy is brilliantly optimistic. He believed in the possibility of endless evolutionary growth. Given the will to progress man can soar to unimagined heights. So he preached his doctrine of the superman, the doctrine of the future ; and the future is the realm of the optimist. But before man has the necessary will to achieve the superman he must have clear vision. This vision proceeds from the reason, which must be clarified of all the down-tending emotions and prejudices. Truth is the foundation of his work. Will to power operating in the medium of unblinded reason is the means by which man may surpass himself and create the superman. According to Nietzsche it is not mere struggle for existence which supplies the motive : it is the will to power, the desire of self-surpassing which is resident in all life and which actuates man in his effort to create a higher self. So he projects himself forward through the natural process of propagation and works for the future, urged by " the unexhausted, procreating life-will."

Mr. Shaw, even before the days of Freud, believed in the importance of sex and realized how its meaning had become obscured by conventional morality. We have already seen that in many of his plays he has tried to lift the phenomenon

of love out of the morass of sentimentality and romance into which it had been thrust. *Man and Superman* is his chief pronouncement on the subject and it aims above all at truth. Mr. Shaw is not afraid to treat sex truthfully, because he sees that sexual love is the only means by which man can utilize the powers of evolutionary development by which the race may climb from the human to the superhuman. Don Juan in the play opens up the future which Mr. Shaw's prophetic hope can grasp :

> The great central purpose of breeding the race, ay, breeding it to heights now deemed superhuman : that purpose which is now hidden in a mephitic cloud of love and romance and prudery and fastidiousness, will break through into clear sunlight as a purpose no longer to be confused with the gratification of personal fancies, the impossible realization of boys' and girls' dreams of bliss, or the need of older people for companionship or money.

Modern psychology has only confirmed the truth of this doctrine. We are beginning to understand now, as we could not twenty years ago, the relation of sexual passion and reproductive tendencies to the rest of our mental activities. We see that the reason does actually control and modify those reproductive forces which we were wont to consider as an uncontrollable part of human nature. An example is to be found in the now obvious fact of birth control, which means the control of population. Although reproduction may be subject to certain immutable laws of nature, birth control opens up vast possibilities for fashioning and perhaps improving the human race. The progress of humanity is always being hampered by the natural tendency to reproduction. In the lower races, and the less highly developed classes of a nation, reproduction is maintained at a high level, and the economic consequence is that each individual has a smaller chance of existence and a smaller measure of commodities. Furthermore, the high reproductivity of these elements is a drag on the more advanced elements. There is consequently a perpetual struggle between the forces of Individuation and Genesis, as Herbert Spencer called them— Individuation being the conscious tendency of the more rationalized man to self-development, and Genesis being

the blinder tendency to race perpetuation through more or less unlimited reproduction.

Mr. Shaw has stated this quite clearly in *Man and Superman.* As we have seen, he has presented the thinking man as struggling against the loss of his freedom to grow, fearful of the entanglements of marital and parental responsibility. That he should so struggle is a token of hopefulness for the progress of the race ; but his complete immunity would spell more rapid disaster. Nature asserts herself ; and through the compelling agency of sexual attraction, operating through the woman, the Life Force—which must be satisfied if the race is to subsist—clings to the skirts of the aspiring individual and prevents him from outsoaring the race and thus defeating his own purpose. At the same time to recognize the necessity for reproduction and the individual sacrifice which it implies is not to say that the individual is helplessly controlled by the reproductive instinct. What it does mean is that man may curb and direct the reproductive instinct so that it does not bolt with him.

All this is embodied in *Man and Superman.* The mind is shown infinite vistas down which it may peer by the light of Mr. Shaw's evolutionary optimism. In *Back to Methusaleh* he is still more explicit. In this play, or series of plays, if indeed they can be called plays at all, he indicates a direction along which voluntary evolution may possibly proceed. Starting from the premiss that the term of man's life is too short for practical purposes, that his body begins to decay when his mind is in its prime, he suggests the possibility that man may direct his will towards altering this inconvenient state of affairs. If human will is the motive force of evolutionary development, it was human will that fixed the term of life at its present duration. So the scene opens with man in the Garden of Eden deciding on decay and death as desirable means of relieving the tedium of existence, which otherwise could be overcome only by accidental destruction. The thought of life hanging between the terrible abysses of immortality and accidental extinction was unendurable. Therefore man created the safer and less tedious means of

preserving life by birth and death, by transmitting the vital essence from generation to generation. For the purposes of his argument Mr. Shaw follows the biblical account of primitive longevity, gradually lessening through a human process. Cain symbolizes the forces of human destructiveness, exhibiting themselves most powerfully in the spirit of warfare, which curtails human life. Now civilization has reached a condition so complex and elaborate that man, cut off at the early age of three score years and ten, cannot command the experience and wisdom which are necessary for the purpose of directing human progress. At length man realizes the need of extending his life, and as soon as he is imbued with the desire and will to do so the thing happens.

The idea sounds preposterous, but it contains more truth than we at first perceive. If man directed his will to the extension of human life he could do much by such obvious expedients as feeding, clothing and housing himself with more wisdom than at present. It is because man in the bulk has not the necessary wisdom that such obvious life-shorteners as poverty and slums are allowed to exist. Man has also to realize, as in the main he certainly does not to-day, that the destructive forces of war on the one hand and unlimited reproduction on the other effectively curtail the average span of life.

Man and Superman and *Back to Methusaleh* are Mr. Shaw's bible, so far as he has written it. In face of these plays no one can accuse Mr. Shaw of being irreligious, merely negative in his work. The fact is that he has unconcealed contempt for the irreligious. Religion is a man's interpretation and his valuation of life. It may be a high and noble or an ignorant and mean religion; but the real irreligion is the vacuous unconcern with life which reduces so many to spiritual inanity. When the teaching of the nineteenth century scientists and philosophers perforated the dogmas of the orthodox churches many men and women saw that the vital fluid had leaked out and the full cask had become a sounding, empty drum. At first there was a cackle of argument. Men smothered their scepticism under phrases extracted from

In Memoriam or otherwise lulled their insurgent reason. Then came another generation which takes irreligion for granted as readily as their fathers accepted the dogmatic teaching of the churches. It is against this irreligion, which implies a dangerous lack of interest in the ends of life, that Mr. Shaw directs his criticism. The foundation of his belief is that human progress can be effected only by act of will. Will implies consciousness and not vacuity. It is no good leaving things to chance. By chance we may pull through to the superman, but by chance we are more likely to revert to lower levels, until finally the river of human life is absorbed by the vast sands of being. It has occurred before in the story of life and it may happen again. As a prophet of the new religion puts it in *Back to Methusaleh* :

> *Franklyn.* . . . However that may be, we may be quite sure of one thing. We shall not be let alone. The force behind evolution, call it what you will, is determined to solve the problem of civilization ; and if it cannot do it through us, it will produce some more capable agents. Man is not God's last word : God can still create. If you cannot do His work He will produce some being who can.
>
> *Burge.* What do we know about Him, Barnabas ? What does anyone know about Him ?
>
> *Conrad.* We know this about Him with absolute certainty. The power my brother calls God proceeds by the method of Trial and Error ; and if we turn out to be one of the errors, we shall go the way of the mastodon and the megatherium and all the other scrapped experiments.

Mr. Shaw has intense faith in the illimitable possibilities of human will acting through the medium of creative evolution, and from his optimism springs the religion which he preaches as a gospel of redemption for modern civilization.

> *Conrad.* . . . Ever since the reaction against Darwin set in at the beginning of the present century, all scientific opinion worth counting has been converging rapidly upon Creative Evolution.
>
> *Franklyn.* Poetry has been converging on it : philosophy has been converging on it : religion has been converging on it. It is going to be the religion of the twentieth century : a religion that has its intellectual roots in philosophy and science just as medieval Christianity had its intellectual roots in Aristotle.

It is a gospel of wisdom, hope, and will, and the greatest of these is will. It is the gospel according to which man has

made his whole history, whether consciously or unconsciously. Consciously he has expressed it in one of the greatest truths that he has ever learned, that " Where there's a will there's a way." The way to the superman lies before us, if only we have the wisdom to see it, the hope of attaining the goal, and the will to urge us to successful achievement. We may not reach the goal as we first conceive it. But we climb to a level from which we can perceive that there is no ultimate goal, and yet retain the faith which will arm us to will a further ascent from strength to strength.

Conclusion

Our consideration of Mr. Shaw's work has been by no means complete, yet no dramatist will receive as much attention in this book. The reason for a fairly full treatment of Mr. Shaw's drama is that he was in so many ways a forerunner of later dramatists and in so many respects the crystallization of modern thought and tendencies.

A final word is due on the question of Mr. Shaw's work as a whole. Pre-eminently a preacher Mr. Shaw is drawn to a didactic method. With " a passion for reforming the world " he treats first one social sore and then another. It needed no little pluck to stand forth as a didactic dramatist in the eighteen-nineties, when artists were preaching the doctrine of absolute beauty and art for art's sake. Mr. Shaw was quite outspoken in his " contempt for belles lettres " : " for art's sake alone I would not face the toil of writing a single sentence." " If you dont like my preaching," he says, " you must lump it. I really cannot help it." [1] The consequence of basing art on particular social questions which time may solve is its inevitable superannuation. Already the particular problems which inspire such plays as *The Philanderer* and even *Fanny's First Play* are a trifle *démodés*, and one looks forward to a similar tarnishing of the interest of *Widowers' Houses* and *Major Barbara*. Drama which is concerned with social phenomena of this kind

[1] *Man and Superman*, Epistle Dedicatory.

cannot last like plays whose roots are fixed deep in the soil of human nature. Mr. Shaw is fully alive to this. He assures us that he suffers from no "illusion of mind as to the permanence of those forms of thought (call them opinions) by which I strive to communicate my bent to my fellows. To younger men they are already outmoded." At the same time he knows that he is vital and earnest; and impelled by his own energy of thought and feeling he expresses himself in his particular manner and through the form which suits his particular genius. One can conceive that three centuries hence it will be only the somewhat learned sociologists and antiquaries who will be able to make head or tail of much of Mr. Shaw's work; whilst the tragedies of Sophocles and Shakespeare retain a fresh human appeal.

Mr. Shaw has not failed to realize that, if he wishes to convince society of those ills which he desires to cure, he must administer the remedial dose sufficiently disguised to make it palatable. He knows that with the great unmalleable lump which we call the public it is useless to rely on mere predicatory fervour. Fabian tracts are valuable pabulum for the converted, but they do not attract the uninitiated palate. That is why Mr. Shaw is a dramatist; because he has learned that the theatre is far the best pulpit. But only if you are clever enough, as Mr. Shaw is, to dress out your sermon in such guise as to cajole the congregation into swallowing it with avidity.

Mr. Shaw knows that the most effective weapon at his disposal is ridicule,—far more potent than doctrinal rhetoric, however fervent. To achieve the ridiculous he has resort to a ceaseless flow of wit, which is plied with irresistible force. On the whole Mr. Shaw's art is not humorous. He is perhaps too much in earnest, too puritanical, to be genuinely humorous. Humour springs from a sunny, radiantly benevolent nature and implies a certain *abandon*. Shakespeare had just the nature which expresses itself naturally through humour. But Mr. Shaw does not let himself go. Intent on his purpose, he always keeps himself well in hand. Humour is a product of the emotions: wit springs from the

mind. Consequently we should expect to find Mr. Shaw witty rather than humorous. He can produce a character like John Tanner, an Androcles, a Cæsar and even a William Boon. He might have achieved Bottom or Malvolio ; but not Sir Toby Belch and by no means Falstaff.

Another most characteristic device is Mr Shaw's unique capacity for inversion. The absurd, topsy-turvy whimsicality with which he stands the world on its head is one of his most attractive gifts. But if he seems to do these juggling feats easily and naturally it is because he can command and control his mind as perfectly as a Cinquevalli commands and controls his muscles. We delight to see him poking fun at the most cherished idols and conventions because he does it so delicately and skilfully. Deliver a frontal attack on the British sense of respectability and you find yourself opposed by a thousand spears. Yet the most respectable and conventional Englishman is immensely tickled by *Fanny's First Play*. Naturally a man who pokes fun at his own work (as Mr. Shaw does in that play) is a harmless jester, so we may laugh when he pokes fun at us. Thus the armour is not braced as tight as it would be if we realized his nefarious intention, and consequently some darts succeed in going home.

So great is his belief in the efficacy of laughter as a mask for his earnestness that he is reckless in absurdity. Impossible plots and characters, gross caricature and incredible farce are the means by which this intensely practical man, this cool reasoner and facer of facts grasps the truth whilst seeming to twist it out of all recognition. In *Androcles and the Lion* the laughter is not amusing, but horrible. It grates harshly on the ear, this devil laughter, and succeeds only in shocking and disgusting. And then again there is grinning and gibbering of death's heads in that haunted abode of melancholy, Heartbreak House, gruesome almost beyond endurance. Mr. Shaw's heart was perchance broken ; and what wonder, before that awful scene of human wreckage. Except in those two plays the laughter is not harsh, and although often corrosive it is never sour. It is good fun to

see even such great heroes as Cæsar and Napoleon in shirt and small clothes, and mockery which some have called irreverent is usually directed against what ought not to be revered. Even in that fervently religious and superficially blasphemous play, *Blanco Posnet*, the serious vein is embedded in comedy; and Dubedat, the central figure of *The Doctor's Dilemma*, Mr. Shaw's only play which can be included in the ordinary category of tragedy, is really a comic figure and the play moves to a comic accompaniment. The nearest approach which Mr. Shaw makes to serious treatment is in that very unpleasant play *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and in *The Devil's Disciple*. The former is tragedy, although lacking the conventional climax, and the latter is frank melodrama. In *Mrs. Warren's Profession* there is certainly very little comedy: *sæva indignatio* burns with a fierce glow, and for once the atmosphere is too intense to support laughter. *The Devil's Disciple*, however, although of sombre tissue, is brightened by comic situation and lively wit. No play in which General Burgoyne and Major Swindon sit at the same table could pass without laughter. Nevertheless the theme is essentially serious for all the ludicrous trimmings and absurd "happy ending."

Mr. Shaw also realizes the extraordinary pleasure which the average man and woman take in novelty and modernity. He is consequently at pains to be up-to-date in the externals of drama. In 1892 he wrote in *The Philanderer* of the New Woman, who was then really new; and in 1903 it was the New Man who rode in a new motor car in *Man and Superman*. *The Doctor's Dilemma* dealt with the most novel medical theories, and *Fanny's First Play* introduced the up-to-date interest of the militant suffragette. In 1910 an aeroplane added to the gaiety of *Misalliance*, and air raids and tanks were still novelties when they appeared in *Heartbreak House*. The difficulties of recruiting for the new armies inspired *O'Flaherty V.C.* In *The Inca of Perusalem* Mr. Shaw lost no time in catching the comedy of Kaiser Wilhelm's megalomania in its final war act, and in 1918 he seized on bolshevism as a feature of *Annajanska*.

In all these ways Mr. Shaw has coated the didactic pill and washed it down our throats with a draught of laughter. It is many years since he wrote: "I must recognize, as even the ancient mariner did, that I must tell my story entertainingly if I am to hold the wedding guest spellbound in spite of the siren sounds of the loud bassoon." He has certainly succeeded. He has looked at life and our modern civilization with an eye clearer perhaps than that of any of his contemporaries. His single aim has been truth. Gifted with his great faculties he has regarded life critically, and with the hammer and ardour of the iconoclast he has strewn his stage with broken idols. But he has done much more. Where he has pulled down, he has built. He has, at any rate in some of his plays, touched the vital and elemental facts of life, and with the hand of a creative artist he has constructed for the help of mankind his philosophy of life. It is not perfect, it is not complete. But it is a real contribution to human thought and to the interpretation of the great issues of existence. It owes much to previous thinkers, as all additions to thought and knowledge must. But it is a real addition: it is at once a clarification and an interpretation of what has gone before. In this constructive work Mr. Shaw has justified his destructive activities which were a necessary preparation for his positive work. For, in the words of Nietzsche, "he who hath to be a creator in good and evil—verily, he hath first to be a destroyer, and break values in pieces." Of all good deeds creation is the best and greatest.

CHAPTER IX

BARKER

We have examined the various directions in which Mr. Shaw made way for a more realistic dramatic method. He is not a realist himself, if by realism we mean the depiction of a ' slice of life ' with particular attention paid to the superficial details which convince the eye. He is a realist in that he swept away many of the baseless conventions of the stage and of life which prevented earlier dramatists from grasping and depicting the reality of things. His manner is whimsical and fanciful, but his art is based on truth.

He was to be followed by a man who owed much to his leading in the realm of ideas. But in manner he has no competitors. Mr. Shaw's personality is so peculiar and his style is so individual that none but a brazen imitator could approach his method. The dramatists whom we are about to consider were young men when the twentieth century dawned. Mr. Granville Barker was born in 1877 and St. John Hankin in 1869. They were both of them artists who believed in realism, the realism which strives to paint with photographic accuracy, which lavishes care on every line and hair in the portrait, which seeks salvation after the manner of the old artist who produced a picture of fruit which enticed the birds to peck.

Mr. Barker was born after Hankin but he began his dramatic career earlier. In 1899 the young man of twenty-two produced *The Marrying of Ann Leete*, in which he showed that he had imbibed the most up-to-date doctrines. The play is concerned chiefly with the question of woman. Ann

is the daughter of Carnaby Leete, politician and landed aristocrat, who has made his elder daughter, Lady Cottesham, marry for political purposes. The union is a miserable failure. The play opens with an ill-bred jest in which Lord John Carp kisses Ann for a bet. This blow to her womanhood strikes the spark of life in her and her high spirit is instantaneously kindled. The play is a gesture of youth struggling for expression. Carnaby Leete is past his prime, effete and nerveless. But his vitality emerges in the younger generation. Lady Cottesham is shackled in the prison house of conventional marriage; but George, his son, has insisted on marrying Dolly, farmer Crowe's daughter, in competition with another suitor, John Abud, his father's gardener. George and Ann symbolize youth in revolt. He urges Ann not to surrender like their sister to the tyranny of the old: "Ann, you marry—when you marry—to please yourself." Then comes Lord John Carp wooing her. It is a political wooing. Ann loathes him, but her loathing is mingled with the terror of attraction and a fear that circumstances are too powerful for her. She is being asphyxiated by the artificial atmosphere she is forced to breathe, and she cries out for help.

> *Ann.* I'm growing up . . . Sally don't let me be forced to marry.
> *George.* Force of circumstances, my dear Ann.
> *Ann.* Outside things. Why couldn't I run away from this garden and over the hills . . . I suppose there's something on the other side of the hills.
> *Sarah.* You'd find yourself there . . . and circumstances.
> *Ann.* So I'm trapped as well as that Lord John.

Civilization has trapped her. As George says, "No one *lives* in the polite world." Convention has sapped living of its vitality. Ann is a new woman. She hates and fears the old love chase, and wants to follow the dictates of reason. "I want to take people mentally." She is cousin to Vivie Warren and the intellectual young women of Shavian drama.

The tensity of this rare, unnatural atmosphere is suddenly rent by insurgent fact. "Nature's an encumbrance to us," wails Carnaby Leete. Abud, the rejected lover of Dolly,

bursts in breathlessly with news that Dolly has given birth to a child. This is Nature's gesture: this is Life. Ann, caught in the arms of Life and Nature, craves for Life, and she asks Abud, the gardener, to marry her—quite calmly—in the presence of her father and sister. Lady Cottesham is petrified, her father is stunned: but Nature has her way.

We are given a glimpse of the convergence of three worlds. The meeting is occasioned by the marriage of John Abud and Ann. There are the old, scented, snuff-taking grandparents, Sir George and Lady Leete, with Carnaby Leete and Lady Cottesham; Mr. and Mrs. Crowe and Mr. and Mrs. Prestige, the old farming folk; and the new world of youth, clean-limbed, clean-minded, unsophisticated youth—George and Dolly, John Abud and Ann. It is a comic gathering in which the forces of youth and nature triumph over the effeteness of age and convention. The last scene shows us the young married couple who have retired to their cottage home. It is again a struggle, the fight between nature and sophistication. John and Ann are taking an awful hazard in making this rash experiment. But they see the risk and decide that it is better than suffocation. If they fail they can at least hold their tongues; and even failure would be better than the extinction which awaited Ann in the over-civilized world which she has abandoned at Nature's call.

This first play, although it is unlike anything else that Mr. Barker has done, is indicative of the main lines on which he was to work. Later he was to be the meticulous realist. Here he is almost Turneresque. We see dim figures moving in obscuring mist; we hear unseen voices speaking across the grey void. In a sense the garden in which most of the play takes place recalls not so much the romantic glow of Turner, but the pale dreamy art of an Aubrey Beardsley. The whole play is ghostly in its unreality: but it is eccentric rather than mysterious, curious rather than weird. As in a dream we hear voices speaking solemn nonsense; we accept strange values without question; we listen without awe and without wonder to the eerie hushed voices speaking a queer language which is at once strange and natural. There is an

overpowering sense of the inevitable. The atmosphere and effect are curiously, awfully compelling. It reminds one of a very few other plays, and these are more modern. Tchekhov created the same kind of psychological atmosphere in *The Cherry Orchard* and Mr. Shaw more recently has achieved it in *Heartbreak House.* But neither of these has the radiance which at times breaks through the enveloping gloom in Mr. Barker's play.

The play is inspired chiefly by the idea that Nature, acting through the medium of youth and life, will destroy mortifying conventions and urge the young to fulfil her behests. It is in fact the doctrine of the Life Force. Yet it is to be noted that the play appeared a few years before Mr. Shaw had expounded his ideas in *Man and Superman.* But the wider teaching of the play rests on the doctrine of self-realization which we have seen in relation to Mr. Shaw's work to be so dominant a note of modern philosophical and social tendency. This idea is bound up with the glorification of youth and freedom, which represent the solvent tendencies acting against the conserving forces of maturity and convention.

In subsequent plays idea tends more and more to dominate plot. Mr. Barker becomes a realist in form and is thus prevented from being as frankly didactic as Mr. Shaw. Didacticism is there, but it is cloaked very astutely under the guise of didactic, talking characters, such as Edward Voysey and Philip Madras. The next play, *The Voysey Inheritance* (1905), attains a high degree of realism. The picture of the solicitor's office of Voysey and Son in Act I., or the home life of the well-to-do middle class in the Voysey dining-room at Chislehurst, are triumphs of photographic realism. The dramatist gives attention to the smallest details. The dialogue is far different from the smart parry and thrust of Pinero and Wilde ; there is none of the witty absurdity of Mr. Shaw. Mr. Barker knows that ordinary folk are apt to talk very ordinary stuff ; so he gives to his dialogue something of the commonplace triviality which suits it to the people who figure on his stage. This is a noticeable feature of *The Voysey Inheritance,* but it is still more striking in the

pitiful conversation which flourishes, or languishes, in the home of the Huxtables in *The Madras House*.

Mr. Voysey has the idealism of a John Gabriel Borkman : his splendid criminality is thrown into sharp contrast by the righteous idealism of his son Edward. His overmastering character stands out against the background of feminine dependence in his home. Mrs. Voysey, a deaf but not unhappy old lady, is cultured but crushed ; Honor, his elder daughter, is the family hewer of wood and drawer of water, also crushed, but content. The spirit of revolting youth is symbolized in the youngest daughter, Ethel, who, like Ann Leete, is almost wildly seeking to find means for self-expression in her passionate love for Denis Tregoning. Beatrice, wife of Hugh Voysey, is the protagonist of freedom. She is the champion of independent womanhood. She has succeeded in becoming self-supporting, and she and Hugh have now decided to separate. She has frankly been brutalized by poverty. Alice Maitland can afford to have fine feelings ; but Beatrice points out that she is too poor to indulge in such emotional refinement.

Such is the degrading price of Beatrice's freedom. She exchanges all higher human instincts for sordid ends. The fact is that though we rightly strive for freedom, complete, untrammelled individual freedom is neither possible nor desirable. Candida realized that and so does Alice Maitland. It is she who teaches this lesson to Edward Voysey. Edward is borne down by the overpowering burden which has fallen on his shoulders at the death of his father. Hating the sham and wickedness of the Voysey business his instinct for spiritual freedom urges him to expose everything and heroically to pay the penalty in gaol. But Alice persuades him that he must not accept his freedom ; that his desire to cast off the shackles is not unmingled with a touch of too-good-to-live priggishness. We must all work like galley slaves of society. Commonplace people are needed to tidy up the mess made by the splendid genius.

It is a play of imprisonment. Every Voysey, except perhaps Ethel, who was fortunate enough to be born

sufficiently late to escape the ardent educational direction of her parents, and Trenchard, who violently cut himself adrift, are confined in the Happy Home prison. Family honour and respectability, which include all the proprieties, and amongst them a due subjection of the women to the men, grip the Voyseys in their iron grasp. Edward fears little the possibility of imprisonment for fraud, because he finds it worse to be subject to the tyranny of hypocrisy and sham which he is pledged to support. "I *am* in prison," he cries, "a less pleasant one than Wormwood Scrubs. But we're all prisoners, Mr. Booth." Mr. Barker can appreciate freedom at its true value. He sees the horror and the degrading effect of too little liberty; but he shows that what we take for freedom is often mere selfishness and a refusal to submit to the social claims which demand service and self-sacrifice. He shows further that it is through service and self-sacrifice, through directing our instinct for self-realization into the channel of altruism, that we find the highest and purest freedom, the freedom of the soul. Not Beatrice and Hugh with their demand to follow each a loveless, selfish course, not Major Booth Voysey, who bullies and tyrannizes over all, not old Mr. Voysey with his superb dominance over honesty and his family, not even Ethel and Hugh with their simple passionate love, but Edward Voysey it is who, with the ennobling comradeship of Alice, attains through love and service to the height of truest freedom, the freedom of the soul.

In *Waste* (1907) Mr. Barker returns to the question of sex which he had treated in his first play. The Life Force is the pivotal idea, but Mr. Barker treats the subject in a way strange to the Shavian philosophy. Henry Trebell, the hero of the play, is a rising politician, independent, but with the party ball at his feet. The Life Force sweeps him away on its irresistible tide, conquering him with the charms of Amy O'Connell, a shallow, attractive little Irish woman. But she is unworthy to do Nature's work: she shirks the responsibility of motherhood and in the process of trying to rid herself of the child she dies under an operation. Trebell is

a man of far vision, inspired by a great faith in life and youth. Hence as a practical politician he is interested primarily in education. As a man he looks to Amy to bear the child which shall be his contribution to the future, the link which he adds to Nature's endless chain of life. His optimistic philosophy of life is rent rudely by disillusion when he learns that Amy fears to take her share in human growth. Life and birth are to this man of such overmastering importance that social taboos are dwarfed to insignificance. " Don't you see," he asks her, " it's only now that you've become a person of some importance to the world ? "

In vain he tries to inspire her with a sense of the greatness of her function in the onward stream of life. She fails and the blight of scandal overwhelms his political career. What waste it all seems to Trebell. Energy is the motive force by which humanity may rise. The greatest that man can do is to give form and direction to this energy : above all he must not allow it to run to waste. Man cannot see far ahead, and the more we strive to plan and to use our energy rationally, the less we are able to decide on the right course. As Trebell says to Amy when he is trying to inspire her with a sense of the high function of motherhood, " We blunder into the best things in life." The great question is whether, having blundered into a good thing, we seize our opportunity.

> *Trebell.* Then comes the test . . have we faith to go on . . to go through with the unknown thing ?
> *Amy.* Faith in what ?
> *Trebell.* Our vitality. I don't give a fig for beauty, happiness, or brains. All I ask myself is . . can I pay Fate on demand ?

This is faith, not ignoble, but simple. It is vain for him to deny that he is an idealist, but his idealism is practical, not without a touch of opportunism. He says to Cantelupe :

> I have no ideals. I believe it is statesmanlike to use all the energy you find . . turning it into the nearest channel that points forward.

This apostle of life, strong in his faith in man's energy to effect his own improvement, is crushed by the catastrophe of waste which overwhelms him. It is too terrible to him to

think that his child and his political career should be killed unborn because he has committed a social solecism. Cantelupe, the ascetic High Churchman, symbolizes for Trebell one of the forces of destruction, a powerful dam to the stream of life. Trebell was on the eve of admission to the Cabinet, but he is kept out largely by the rigid religion and scrupulous morality of Cantelupe. With tragic bitterness he asks Cantelupe :

> if your God didn't make use of men, sins and all . . what would ever be done in the world ? That one natural action, which the slight shifting of a social law could have made as negligible as eating a meal, can make me incapable . . takes the linch-pin out of one's brain, doesn't it ?

Deep is his regret at being impotent to do service to mankind through political activity ; but it is the loss of his unborn child that bites into the soul. He hardens into anger against the woman who has played him false :

> The little fool, the little fool . . why did she kill my child ?

It is in his attitude towards paternity that Mr. Barker gives us a view of the Life Force, which, as we have said, goes beyond Mr. Shaw's treatment. Mr. Shaw has depicted woman as the active vehicle of Nature's urgent desire for reproduction, and man as the vainly unwilling instrument of her purpose. This may be essentially true on biological grounds and true in effect in species where the Life Force is undiverted by social forces and the disturbing influence of a highly developed power of rationalization. But there can be no doubt that in modern human society there are many cases like that of Trebell, where it is the man who consciously desires to project his humanity a stage further forward and express his vitality in offspring. So also there are numberless women who through blind fear or through a process of reasoning have inhibited the reproductive instinct. One may even go further and believe that the instinct of individuation has become so strong in highly civilized society that there are women as well as men in whom the instinct of genesis is, without any conscious process of inhibition based on fear or reason, weakened to such an extent that they have

no desire to reproduce. This does not mean that their sexual desire is weaker ; for sexual instinct and reproductive instinct are not coincident in civilized man, and the discovery by man that he may indulge one without the other has made possible the fact of birth control. But the point that Mr. Barker emphasizes in this play is that Nature may utilize man as well as woman as a primary channel of the Life Force. The feeling of fatherhood is strangely potent in Henry Trebell. " It's very inexplicable," he says, " this sense of fatherhood . . . The man bears the child in his soul as the woman carries it in her body."

It is more than Trebell can support—the destruction of all means of self-realization. When he learns that he is not wanted in the Cabinet it is not merely personal pique, a blow to his ambition or vanity, which crushes him. It is another blow to his vitality. He can do no more with life ; and he shoots himself. We feel with Walter Kent, his secretary, who cries out :

> No, I don't know why he did it . . and I don't care. And grief is no use. I'm angry . . just angry at the waste of a good man. Look at the work undone . . think of it ! Who is to do it ! Oh . . the waste . . !

In *The Madras House* (1910) we have another play of ideas. In certain respects the treatment is sedulously realistic, but the ideas crowd in and didacticism drives out realism. Like *The Voysey Inheritance* it is a play about prisons. The first is the prison of comfortable middle-class family life at Denmark Hill—the home of Mr. Huxtable, a rich draper. Duty is the chain by which the inmates are shackled. Mrs. Madras is Mrs. Huxtable's sister, a wife deserted by the unmentionable Constantine Madras ; she is a member of the happy home at Denmark Hill. She considers it her son Philip's duty to love her. Mrs. Huxtable thinks it is her daughters' duty to love her. The centrifugal force of youth is restrained only by this encircling chain of duty which prevents self-expression in each individual. Society is held together by necessary restrictions, but the value of our conventions is not permanent. Humanity however has so

intense a dislike to disturbing its code of rules that it needs rebels to insist from time to time on revaluation. The Miss Huxtables are not rebels. Emma is well used to her chains. She puts it quite simply: "if one stopped doing one's duty how upside down the world would be." Society does not like rebels: they are disturbing to its equanimity. So it has contrived to establish an unwritten law that it is good form not merely to submit to shackles, but to enjoy them. The girls are happy in the Wormwood Scrubs on Denmark Hill: "It would be so ungrateful not to be." When Mr. Huxtable has provided this comfortable house, this ugly but respectable furniture, and a fine view of the Crystal Palace, unhappiness would indeed bespeak base ingratitude. If occasionally the chains gall, habit of mind comes to the rescue. The daughters have learned the lesson of submission to parental authority and respectability.

> *Emma.* . . . father seems afraid of spending money, though he must have got lots. He says if he gave *us* any more we shouldn't know what to do with it . . . and of course that's true.

The most serious tendency to revolt had been shown by Julia, but her bolshevism had been successfully quelled. She had shown at one period of her life a dangerous proclivity to sketching; but that was adequately crushed. More dangerous was her romantic attachment to a collar marked "Lewis Waller" which had come into her hands through the remissness of a careless laundry. "When mother found out she cried for a whole day. She said it showed a wanton mind." Nature had been pricking her daughter, the Life Force had stirred her veins for a moment; but Mrs. Huxtable had known how to cure such wantonness. Nature had also threatened parental authority in the case of Jane, the youngest daughter, a mere child of twenty-six. When a gentleman proposed marriage to her, "mother said it would have been more honourable if he had spoken to father first, and that Jane was the youngest and too young to know her own mind." Jane was at first very rebellious, but she knuckled under. It may seem hard to believe in

the possibility of such extremes of parental tyranny and crass mismanagement of daughters; but when Mr. Barker wrote this play such practices though perhaps rare were not altogether out-of-date.

The skeleton in the cupboard of the Happy Huxtable Home was shocking Uncle Constantine. He has deserted his wife, yet she looks back with regret to the happier days of married life. She ventures to assure her son Philip that she was not unhappy with his father, but this seems a scandalous thing to Mrs. Huxtable. "Amy," she exclaims in horror, "how could you be happy with a man who was unfaithful to you? What nonsense!" When she explains to Philip how really unhappy his mother had been with this abandoned libertine, he concurs obligingly with her view of Constantine:

> Yes . . . of course Aunt Kate. I know just how you feel about it . . . I'm not fond of him either.

But the lesser is swallowed by the greater, and Mrs. Huxtable is dumbfounded by so egregious a lapse from filial duty, even towards such a man as Constantine. "My dear boy," she cries in pained horror, "and your own father!" We see the absurd and illogical limits to which a blind devotion to convention can lead. It is Mr. Barker's appeal for revaluation, for a wise reconsideration and if necessary a readjustment of the moral values which underlie our family creed.

The second prison house in the play is "Roberts and Huxtable," the large suburban drapery establishment. This supplies the play with another theme for a tract on the times. Mr. Barker indulges in a well-prepared attack on the living-in system, which forces men and women to abstain from marriage, or to contract a clandestine marriage, or to seek life less reputably. The chief wardress is Miss Chancellor, the frigid duenna, another priestess of the great god Duty. Miss Yates has submitted to the urgency of the Life Force. Her transgression is an example of lack of that self-control in which Miss Chancellor herself can glory, perhaps without much difficulty. The virtuous maiden cannot understand

this grossly unladylike attitude towards the facts of life. Instead of shrinking properly from the awful truth Miss Yates has the effrontery to confess quite frankly. She admits to Philip Madras :

> I am really proud and happy about it now, sir . . . I am not pretending. I daresay I've done wrong . . . perhaps I ought to come to grief, but—

She is in fact all that Amy O'Connell was not. She is but a daughter of Eve, tempted and fallen. But at least she can feel something of the great inspiration breathed into her by her mother Nature. She is of the sisterhood of Ann Leete, before all things a woman, soon to be a mother. Ann Leete preferred clean, healthy motherhood, even at the price of social damnation, to immolation at the altar by the side of a degenerate Lord John Carp. Miss Yates finds in her heart not even regret. Nature has swept her out on the tide of life.

Mr. Barker is obsessed in this play by the theme of feminism. He strives to show how modern social conditions put woman into an utterly false position. Constantine Madras, the social and moral heretic, sees that the home on Denmark Hill is a prison and he blasphemously described " Roberts and Huxtable " as " an industrial seraglio." He, being consistent, prefers to become a Mahommedan and follow his instinct on Turkish lines. He is all wrong, hopelessly uncivilized, with his hunter's ideal towards woman. But is he really less civilized than Huxtable, the puritan, whose flesh has been subordinated not by sublimation of his sensuous instincts, but by a rigid strait-jacket of repression ? He is certainly a pleasanter person to meet, and his irrepressible cheerfulness extorts from Huxtable the disastrous confession :

> I was always jealous of you, Constantine, for you seemed to get the best of everything.

Philip Madras is another Edward Voysey, a serious soul not prepared to take life at its face value. He is concerned with problems of his own character and conduct, and he

knows enough to understand that all problems of individual conduct involve deep social questions. Consequently his concern with his own individuality spreads out into a vital interest in economics and sociology. He is deeply concerned with the meaning and foundation of culture. Culture is a growth which depends partly on the seed, but largely on the soil from which it gathers nurture. The Huxtable culture is a poor dried thing because of the stony ground from which it springs, but although it is not luxuriant it has a surprising vitality. The bourgeois culture of England has received a good deal of ridicule and castigation in the last generation or two, but not more than it merited. In the Huxtable Home it flourished true to type, unpleasing but hardy. The more refined class, conscious of a higher ideal of beauty, enjoying its æstheticism and assured of the superiority of its culture, might well despise the philistinism and the devotion to ugliness which seemed to be intrinsic in middle-class respectability. Philip Madras sees all this: he has genuine pity for the joyless surroundings of his Huxtable cousins. But he sees deeper still. He perceives that the much vaunted refinement and æstheticism of his own culture are rooted in a dunghill. Mr. Shaw has shown how the culture of Blanche Sartorius had drawn nourishment from a weltering mass of human misery. Philip is filled with horror when he makes the same discovery. His wife is beautiful, clean, healthy, virtuous and refined at the terrible price of ignorance, poverty, squalor, disease and misery paid by a suffering underworld. Jessica, his wife, may enjoy free womanhood; but does she realize at what cost that freedom is bought? If the virtue and health and elegance of a small class are bought at so great price it behoves us to appraise their quality carefully to see whether they are really worth the cost to humanity. They need to be of exceeding worth to justify the vast payment we make. Philip presents the case frankly, even brutally, to Jessica, and insists that they consider whether "we good and clever people are costing the world too much." He suggests to her that even in her world man and woman have scarcely advanced

beyond the savage state of sex warfare and that the mean sensual man—the ordinary man of her world—

> looks on you all as choice morsels . . . with your prettinesses, your dressings up, your music and art as so much sauce to his appetite. Which only a mysterious thing called your virtue prevents him from indulging . . . almost by force, if it weren't for the police.

She does not like this plain statement : she declares that she does not believe it. But its truth cannot be gainsaid.

Philip has grown past the conventional culture of his class, but he is no philistine. He is a creative iconoclast. He is striving after revaluation of his ideals of life ; and this is how he sums up his new faith :

> I want an art and a culture that shan't be just a veneer on savagery . . . but it must spring in good time from the happiness of a whole people.

Thus inspired he must step on the common highway of life. He hears the still, sad music of humanity, and it is not harsh nor grating but infinitely compelling. He will do what he can, little enough may be, to till the soil so that a healthier culture may flourish. He must at any rate do some definite work for the people, even if it is only by service as a County Councillor. He appeals to Jessica to accompany him on his quest of true beauty. " Come out," he cries to her and her like, " and be common women among us common men." Leave the pleasant alleys and artificial plats of your elegant garden and cultivate the flower of the heath and the hedge-row. Help to clear away the brambles and the thistles, follow the plough if need be, take your share of hedging and ditching, drain the stagnant fen and irrigate the parched plains. Then you may see a growth more beautiful than was ever imagined, a rich, ripe, smiling land in which culture is good and true and worth while because it springs from the happiness of a whole people.

It will be clear from our somewhat full account of Mr. Barker's plays that he is pre-eminently a dramatist of ideas. But he is also profoundly interested in character. These two aspects of his art occupy so much of his attention that

action and play construction are apt to suffer. The plot of *The Voysey Inheritance* is not convincing as a story. It may not be essential for drama to rest on events: there is such a thing as the drama of ideas and of psychological development. But if a dramatist has a plot it must support and not drag down the imagination. In *The Voysey Inheritance* the precise legal position, the degree of criminality, the feasibility of Edward's continuance of the sham when so many know the damning truth, and the equivocal end, all tend to hinder rather than help the imagination. The construction of the play is weakened by a tendency to fall asunder. The part before and the part after the death of Mr. Voysey lack perfect cohesion; and the unity of the play suffers from the double climax, first Mr. Voysey's death and the discovery, and then after a re-establishment of affairs the final crash which Mr. Booth precipitates. In *The Voysey Inheritance* there is at least unity of idea, and the themes of the family ideal and Edward's own soul-struggle are skilfully blended. But in *The Madras House* the ideas are less successfully welded. Woman is the central subject of the play—woman at Denmark Hill, woman at "Roberts and Huxtable," woman as understood by the Mahommedan Constantine, and woman in Jessica's refined circle. But Mr. Barker has missed achieving perfect unity. He has strung various beads on a thread, but they are apt to strike the eye rather as a row of beads than as a whole necklace.

But there can be no question as to Mr. Barker's ability to create character. He lavishes his skill on depicting his men and women. His method is not, however, that of the dramatist who illuminates character by the quick flash of action, a method of which Shakespeare is so consummate a master: like Browning he depends more on revelation through words. It is true that Mr. Barker can use both devices, as in *The Marrying of Ann Leete* and *The Voysey Inheritance*, and more especially in the former. There he is sparing of words, but actions are very vocal. In *The Voysey Inheritance* action is subordinate to talk; and in *Waste* and *The Madras House* ideas have invaded the stage and the

dramatist lapses more and more into verbal exposition of the thesis which is supported on a skeleton of events.

Mr. Barker knows how to handle passion and emotion. In the young folk of *The Marrying of Ann Leete* passion surges through the veins with irresistible force. It is quiet, it depends little, as we have seen, on words ; but its tide is all-powerful : old age and social conventions are swept helplessly away by its flood. The passion of Edward Voysey and the love of Alice Maitland are full-blooded, but they are maturer and less impulsive. The Life Force is in them, but reason takes its share in this mating. It is nevertheless the marriage of true souls, who at length see clearly, thanks to the keen vision and purging honesty of the woman. In the two later plays passion plays a smaller part. It is present in these plays as a cause of the conditions which the dramatist presents rather than as the subject of his study.

We have already glanced at the realistic manner of *The Voysey Inheritance*. *Waste* and *The Madras House* are so heavily laden with didacticism, there is so much for the characters to say in exposition of the ideas which Mr. Barker wishes to convey, that dialogue is apt, as in Mr. Shaw's theatre, to become speech-making. Despite Mr. Barker's care to introduce sententious characters as a mouthpiece for these orations the result is to imperil the realistic effect. To say this is not to condemn the plays, unless we are pledged to realism as the only way by which the dramatist may find salvation. Fifteen years ago when Mr. Barker was writing plays many held this belief : but to-day it is less credited. Although his later work is less consistently photographic in manner, there are remarkably realistic patches in these plays.

We have already referred to the realism of the picture of Denmark Hill. The first act of *Waste* is equally remarkable, as indeed are all Mr. Barker's first acts. Every dramatist is faced by the elementary difficulty of initial exposition of his characters and plot. Not every dramatist has been so superbly careless as the author of *The Tempest*, but few have shown so much skill as Mr. Barker. The exposition of *The Madras House* proceeds with ease, as simply and naturally as

a flower unfolding its petals. We are never conscious of the dramatist's effort to inform us of the previous circumstances of the play and the past history of the characters; but we learn all that is necessary. The opening scene of *Waste* is remarkable in the same way. Mr. Barker knows that in actual life the participants of a conversation do not need to rehearse their own history, with the result that an unexpected listener might feel somewhat puzzled until he gradually picked up the threads. We have that slight sense of bewilderment at the beginning of *Waste*. No one steps out of the picture to explain things for our benefit as was so frequently the case in earlier drama. We are consequently somewhat at a loss until thread by thread we pick up the story and gather facts concerning the characters. This is one of the ways in which Mr. Barker developed the realistic tendency in play construction. He was only carrying on the same process which Robertson had begun, which Mr. Jones and other late Victorians continued and which expressed itself in the abandonment by Mr. Shaw of soliloquies and asides. We shall see that before the turn of the tide of realism other dramatists were to carry these external devices even further.

Mr. Barker's contribution to English drama is certainly important. He refined the realistic method, and that was a good work. There may be no virtue in realism as such, but at any rate it serves the useful purpose of showing up the artificial drama which lacked not merely external realism but the inherent reality and the essential truth without which art must perish. Mr. Shaw had attacked unreality and falsehood, but his art, though based on reality, cannot be called realistic. To each his method. Their ends were the same. We have seen that at times Mr. Barker's interest in character and idea entices him out of the path of realism. There is always a danger of a talking part becoming dull. Mr. Shaw had made full use of the two chief means by which a dramatist may avoid this danger: his ideas are vitally interesting and his talk dazzles with the brilliancy of its wit. Mr. Barker has not got the great Irishman's gift of wit and

he is consequently thrown back on the quality of his ideas as the only way of escape from dullness. That he has succeeded is the highest tribute to his gift as a philosopher.

That he is not only a thinker but a man of imagination, a man not without a sense of the essential qualities of a poet, is proved by his first play. Still better evidence is to be found in his work as a dramatic producer. It is to be hoped that Mr. Barker, who is still in his prime, will emerge from his comparative obscurity as an artist and make further contributions to the theatre which he has already enriched to no small extent.

Note.—Whilst this book is in proof Mr. Barker has published a new play, *The Secret Life.*

CHAPTER X

HANKIN

A DRAMATIST whose place in the development of modern drama we cannot overlook is Hankin. A study of his work gives the impression that when Hankin died in 1909 at the age of forty he had better work in him than he had yet given in the seven plays which he presented to the world. Hankin was a realist, but his realism is akin to that of Mr. Shaw rather than to the realism of Mr. Barker. We have seen the photographic exactitude of some of Mr. Barker's plays ; but Hankin, like Mr. Shaw, was a realist in that he depicted a dramatic world stripped of the conventions and sentimental fictions which had characterized the Victorian stage.

It is not true of Mr. Shaw, but it is in the main true of Hankin, that emotion and passion were foreign to his art. From his first play, *The Two Mr. Wetherbys* (1903), onwards sentiment is treated with cold cynicism. The folly of James Wetherby—the "good" Mr. Wetherby—consists in a pertinacious attempt to maintain an appearance of fondness for his wife even though her tastes and way of life are stifling to his own individuality. The "bad" Mr. Wetherby—Richard—who is a thoroughly good-natured, cheerful person, has found it far more satisfactory in similar circumstances to live separately from his wife. He persuades James of the advantages of being frank and telling his wife that he enjoys his amusements, that his supposed attendance at charity meetings is a hoax, and in short that he is not the "good" man she takes him for. The pretty result is that James in vain implores a revolted wife not to leave him, whilst her sister, Constantia, having discovered the social

inconveniences of separation, makes fruitless efforts to induce Richard to take her back. Finally James's wife relents and forgives, but Richard persists in his cheery but immutable refusal to reassume the marital yoke.

The Return of the Prodigal (1905) is still more cynical in its ending. Hankin was determined to avoid the conventional happy ending. The dramatists of the 'eighties and 'nineties had rebelled against the inevitable happy ending which most playwrights wrenched from a tragic plot. They had established the right to end a tragedy tragically, or to treat a sombre theme without the final fireworks of unnatural repentances and reconciliations and wedding-bells. Hankin, following Mr. Shaw, went further and asserted the fitness of ending even a comedy without the sentimental roundings off which custom had approved. Naturally the world looks to every prodigal for a proper repentance and even a temporary access of rectitude before the curtain falls. But Eustace Jackson will none of it. He has a good fill of fatted calf, and full measure of resentment from his orthodox elder brother, Henry. He admits readily to having wasted the £1,000 with which he had been sent to Australia, and argues therefrom the futility of his father's suggestion to repeat the process. He explains with cool logic that he can no more help wasting his life than his father and brother can help working hard and piling up money. Ergo his father and brother have no more right to the money than he. Of course he cannot force his father to support him ; but he suggests that it would really be the simplest way out of the difficulty. Otherwise he would be obliged to go to the neighbouring workhouse. How deplorable that would be. It would imperil his father's social position in the county, recently acquired at great cost ; and as for his chances of winning the parliamentary seat, as he was intending, they would inevitably be ruined. It is all perfectly true, perfectly clear. Mr. Jackson and Henry may strut and fume to their heart's content ; but they know they must make the allowance. And so it is arranged. The prodigal is endowed with a gratuitous income of £250.

The Charity that Began at Home (1906) is less bitter, but not without its cynicism. Lady Denison and Margery lavish their charity and kindness on all the pitiable and the friendless. The result is hopeless confusion and quite amusing comedy. Hankin saw the danger of pity—the danger of mawkishness, futility and enfeeblement to both the bestower and the receiver of pity—with something of the fierceness of Nietzsche. So he sets out in this play to laugh at what he regards as a characteristically modern weakness. The passion of pity is shown in all its absurdity and grotesqueness in the ridiculous behaviour of Lady Denison and her daughter. In Basil Hylton, their hero and inspirer, it is less gross. At any rate he is not a fool. He has a philosophy of pity: whether right or wrong his idealistic altruism is not founded on mental vacuity. Pitted against him is Hugh Verreker, a philosophic egoist. The egoism of Mrs. Eversleigh is crude: hers is the selfishness of a heartless, brainless, narrow-minded snob. Verreker believes sincerely that altruism is bad. This disciple of Nietzsche (of whom he had probably never heard and whom he had certainly not read) had been a soldier until in a regrettable moment he had misappropriated mess funds. He regards altruism as a form of self-indulgence which attacks people of a certain constitution. It is certainly nothing to praise, but rather a habit to be curbed. He believes in assertive self-expression, and sees in altruism only a dangerous proclivity to divert the energy of life into channels which will lead it into useless human swamps. He falls far short of the high aim of Nietzsche, who was egoistical only because he was altruistic. Nietzsche's ideal was the superman, his altruism reached forward to the future race; and he forced himself with violence to curb pity for struggling humanity because he believed that it would devitalize and weaken the energy which should be devoted to the great men of his imagining. Verreker is selfish on principle, but it is a low principle: "I don't want to make the world better," he asserts. "I think the world's all right as it is."

Even Verreker's selfishness however is ironically overcome at last. The first and last unselfish action of his life, so he

says, is his breaking off the engagement with Margery. This rationalist is dazzled only for a moment by the glow of romance. He is fully capable of love and there is no doubt about his affection for Margery. But he will not accept the romantic view of marriage. Love is essential, but not in itself enough. The Life Force may lift a man and woman off their feet on the tide of love because Nature needs fulfilment of her creative purpose. But it may leave them high and dry on a barren mud flat unless they have the affinities of character and taste which will preserve companionship even when passion has worked its will. At the moment he is in the grip of passionate love; but his judgement recovers quickly. He has for a whole week served the philanthropic interests of Margery; but he knows that he cannot keep it up. "Fancy *me* distributing soup to old ladies and soliciting votes for a blighted orphan! It's simply disgusting." He has the foresight to see that the time would come when he must choose between the miserable fraud of the "good" Mr. Wetherby and the catastrophe of the "bad" Mr. Wetherby. He prefers to nip his passion whilst it is only sprouting. Margery naturally finds it difficult to appreciate his unselfishness; but it is unselfishness.

> *Verreker.* I love you as much as ever, more perhaps, now that I'm going to lose you. But on every ground except love I'm quite unfit to marry you.
>
> *Margery.* Surely love is enough?
>
> *Verreker.* No, it isn't. Margery, let's face facts and not shirk them as everyone else seems to do Marriage isn't a thing to be romantic about It *lasts* too long.
>
> *Margery.* Hugh!
>
> *Verreker.* My dear, it may last forty years. Surely that's long enough in all conscience. Very well then. As one marries for a long time one should choose carefully, reasonably. One mustn't be carried away by passion. Passion's a great thing in marriage but commonsense is a greater. Now what sort of life should we make of it together if we married, you and I? Why, my dear, we've not an idea or a taste in common. Everything you say makes me laugh and almost everything I think would make you blush. It's simply absurd for a girl like you to marry a fellow like me. Let's say so frankly and end it.

Thus Hankin flouted the orthodox conventions of the drama which demanded a sentimental dénouement. One

sees clearly the influence of Mr. Shaw who had peopled his stage with coldly unromantic heroes and heroines. Verreker is of the same family as Vivie Warren and Captain Bluntschli, a younger brother of Jack Tanner, but more fortunate in being able to extricate himself successfully from Nature's clutches. To emphasize his theory Hankin described his dénouements as "happy endings." "Three Plays with Happy Endings" was the general title of the volume which included *The Return of the Prodigal, The Charity that Began at Home* and *The Cassilis Engagement.* It was his idea of a happy ending—a blow in the face of dramatic orthodoxy which from such a description expected something very different.

The Cassilis Engagement (1907) is the most bitterly cynical of all his plays. The heir to a big fortune and a country estate is trapped by a vulgar old adventuress and her heartless, intriguing daughter, Ethel Borridge. Mrs. Cassilis, a refined aristocrat, devoted to her only son Geoffrey, is determined to save him from the clutches of these women. But she has clearness of intellect and an almost diabolical subtlety which teach her that she must meet guile with guile. Snobbish friends and relatives would adopt methods which are not only rude but foolish. Mrs. Cassilis has a marvellous gift for psychological perception. She quickly grasps the fact that Geoffrey has been trapped, but she is wise enough to realize that rudeness to Ethel or any sign of opposition to Geoffrey would only reinforce his infatuation. Her place is on her son's side, against the world. So she pets him and lavishes affectionate endearment on Ethel. She insists that Mrs. Borridge and Ethel shall spend a long visit with her. She asks half the county to meet them; she takes them to her friends' houses. In fact she gives them an open field for the display of their blatant vulgarity and coarseness of mind. Geoffrey is given ample opportunity to appreciate his new relations. But the secret of her success is her discovery that Ethel's vulgar, crude tastes are quite incompatible with the no less crude animal tastes of Geoffrey and his friends. They like the usual pursuits of leisured country life. Ethel, who

cannot ride or shoot, but has keen zest for the excitements of the town, is reduced by the assiduous hospitality of Mrs. Cassilis to a state of prostrating boredom. In the end the leaven works and Ethel cries off the engagement, and despite the anger of her frustrated mother and the amorous protestations of Geoffrey she goes off in dudgeon and leaves the lorn youth to the affectionate ministrations and tender sympathy of his triumphant mother. By making Mrs. Borridge and Ethel ruthless, intriguing wretches Hankin succeeds in catching our sympathy for Mrs. Cassilis ; but the calculating genius of a mother whose affection leads her to spin such a subtle wed of deception round her son leaves a rough taste. Undoubtedly she did Geoffrey an inestimable service ; undoubtedly she would have failed if she had followed the crude plan of opposition or even of persuasion ; but it is a matter for sorrowful reflection to think that to achieve her end she needed to stoop to such depths of falsehood. But Hankin had no illusions as to human frailty, and he aimed at showing that if we want to avert its evil consequences we must assume not only the gentleness of the dove but also the wisdom of the serpent. The result is perhaps clarifying to the intellect in that it purges us of sentimental and romantic ideas which only enervate and degrade.

Coming to *The Last of the De Mullins* (1908), we see Hankin exhibiting powers different from and in some ways greater than those which he had shown in his earlier work. The play illustrates the eternal struggle between the old ideal and the new. The De Mullin tradition is feudal, rooted in the soil for centuries. Blessed with neither great wealth nor brains the family had stood like a rock in the stream of English civilization. Pride of race had degenerated with the passage of time into slavish, snobbish worship of an effete ideal. Janet has committed two of the worst crimes known to the De Mullin code. She had asserted a woman's independence and she had soiled a De Mullin's hand with trade. No doubt the ancient De Mullins, named after their mill—Du Moullin—had ground not only the wheat but the money of a people who were prohibited by established right

from grinding their own corn. But it would be a bold man or an unwary who would venture to suggest that the De Mullins had therefore been millers. It is one thing for a poulterer to deal in game, but quite a different matter if a lord of woods and acres sends his surplus pheasants and partridges to market.

To Janet, however, it seemed to be a distinction without a difference. So she chose to earn her livelihood as a milliner rather than subordinate what she regarded as her natural rights to a father's dictation. Her mother and her sister, Hester, have submitted to the De Mullin tyranny. Life and volition are crushed out of these poor creatures. Hester is not so old that Nature has ceased her clamant call to life, but her spirit has been broken. Her personality has been repressed too long, and when love passes her by she has only conventional virtue and the arid formalism of religion with which to satisfy her natural appetite of living.

Janet has revolted against this tyranny. She represents the demand of modern woman to live her own life, to express her own personality; and if need be to override the conventions within which woman has been imprisoned. She had loved passionately and rashly; but when she was thrown on her own resources she closed with life and won a livelihood for herself and her illegitimate child. Like the vivacious heroine of Houghton's *Hindle Wakes* she would rather bear the stigma of unmarried motherhood than lose her self-respect by marrying a man merely "because he thinks he's 'bound in honour.'" Like Wilde's pathetic Mrs. Arbuthnot, that woman of no importance, she finds such joy and glory in bearing and rearing her son that she has no inclination to worry about social orthodoxy.

In some ways Janet De Mullin is an exceptional character in Hankin's plays. One is conscious as a rule that he is disdainful of his characters. Hankin's outlook was misanthropic. He saw men and women with undimmed reason and scorned them for the many weaknesses which spring from their sentiment and conventionality. If it were not for Janet De Mullin one would be inclined to believe that he

had no sympathy with emotion. But he has shown in his treatment of her character that he does not scorn all sentiment. Janet's vision sees through the tags and rags of respectability and sentimentalism in which society, afraid of the facts of life, and especially of sexual love, wraps its blind timidity. Janet's perspicacity pierces the stuffy atmosphere with which we suffocate life. Her keen intellect rends the veil of orthodox shams and humbug. But she is no cynic: her iconoclasm does not spring from bitterness and anger. Love, not hate, is her dominant passion: she feels the sap of life surging through her and she has the pluck not to repress it. Here is a character in whom Hankin can for once express the positive side of his philosophy. In the first scene Janet rises to heights of a passion which springs from the depths of her womanhood. In vain her father rages, and pleads. The hosts of respectability beset her and strive to beat down her defence with cries of Shame! But secure in her sense of the glory of motherhood she is proof against the onset. She refuses to bend the knee to the family Baal and with her son she goes back to her world of happy struggle. Passion seizes her in her farewell speech to her father:

> Whatever happens, even if Johnny should come to hate me for what I did, I shall always be glad to have been his mother. At least I shall have lived. These poor women who go through life listless and dull, who have never felt the joys and the pains a mother feels, how they would envy me if they knew! If they knew! To know that a child is your very own, is a part of you. That you have faced sickness and pain and death itself for it. That it is yours and nothing can take it from you because no one can understand its wants as you do. To feel its soft breath on your cheek, to soothe it when it is fretful and still it when it cries, that is motherhood and that is glorious!

That passage alone is proof that Hankin was more than a cynic and a misanthrope. But it is a rare example of his faith in passionate human nature. It may well be that if he had lived and continued his art the cynic would have given way to the believer and he might have earned another reputation than that of a grinning pessimist.

It was perhaps because of his lack of human sympathy that Hankin failed on the whole as a creator of character.

There are notable exceptions, of whom perhaps the most striking are Janet De Mullin and Mrs. Cassilis; but in the main his characters are very lightly sketched or are mere stage puppets. They represent an idea or a point of view; they serve to fill a niche; but they have not the lifeblood which endows them with independent vitality. In a word they are of the Victorian stage family, which is always recognizable by its similarity of feature and artificiality of manner.

The dialogue is also reminiscent of the same school. It has some of the quick pertness and even brilliance of repartee which were developed by many dramatists of the 'nineties. But its quality is unmistakably stagey. In construction also one sees the manner of the artificial school. At his best Hankin's plot devices are clever, but they are apt to show the working too obviously. At his worst they are clumsy. This is especially noticeable in the awkward way in which he introduces us to the foregone circumstances of a play. Even in such a late play as *The Last of the De Mullins* his manner is very cramped; and we are struck by the unnatural recapitulation of incident which Mrs. De Mullin is forced to make (for our edification) to her sister, Mrs. Clouston.

It is vain to speculate as to what Hankin would have done had he lived. We have seen that he had many shortcomings as an artist. Faults of craftsmanship he might have remedied. More serious was the narrow range of his outlook, and but for the character of Janet De Mullin there was little evidence that the scope of his philosophy was widening. In default of other evidence we must take him as he stands and form a judgement on the facts of the case. Like much of Mr. Shaw's, his work is the art which precipitates and then sweeps up some of the dust of human life: but spring-cleaning, though useful and necessary, is not a very elevating task. Mr. Shaw, as we have seen, has also made a positive, constructive contribution to human experience and knowledge. Hankin had a logical perception that pierced the rosy vapours which surround the evils of

humanity, but in his art we fail to find that faith which has raised Mr. Shaw to great heights. We look in vain for faith and religion in Hankin's work. A fearless unwinking smile lends no irradiating joy to the calm features of this clear-eyed cynic. He purges the rank soil of humanity with a corrosive spray of weed-killer, but he cannot give the nutritive refreshment of heaven's cleansing rain. Mr. Shaw can do both.

CHAPTER XI

GALSWORTHY

The dominant quality of Mr. Galsworthy's work is realism of detail. In the minutiæ of local colour and in accuracy of setting he is one of the cleverest and most careful dramatic craftsmen of the day. His anxiety to achieve realistic effect leads him to an abhorrence of the unrealistic theatricality which characterizes so many modern plays. Anxious to show us a slice of life he avoids the conventional situation of the theatre and the device of working up to a striking episode at the fall of the curtain. His dialogue is very natural. Although it is crisp and pointed, it does not scintillate with the unnatural theatrical brilliancy of Wilde and Pinero.

The greatest menace to Mr. Galsworthy's realism is his didactic tendency; but his skill enables him to cope with the demon of didacticism, and with the utmost subtlety he succeeds in giving it ample scope and yet in keeping it within the bounds of realism. This he achieves by the device of creating occasions for speech-making—the same trick as is found in some of Mr. Barker's plays. Mr. Galsworthy uses this means in *Strife* to give Anthony, Edgar, Roberts and Thomas an opportunity for commenting at length, each from his own point of view, on the central problem of the play. In *Justice* Frome, the barrister, has a chance in the trial scene of making a long speech in which he can propound, on Mr. Galsworthy's behalf, much that the dramatist is anxious to plead on the subject of the treatment of criminals. Again, Stephen More, in *The Mob*, is made

to talk at length, but quite appropriately, on political questions on which Mr. Galsworthy obviously has strong views.

Although realism is so distinct a quality in Mr. Galsworthy's drama, one must admit that there are exceptions. It is, however, well sustained in his best plays, such as *Strife, The Silver Box, Justice,* or *Loyalties.* The exceptions consist chiefly of occasional lapses into staginess. One can find even the old devices of the dramatic situation and the effective curtain, which have already been noted as generally absent from his work. Examples are the end of Act I. of *The Eldest Son,* where Freda reveals to Bill Cheshire the crushing secret that she is to have a child ; and the curtain to Act I. of *The Skin Game* in which we are shown the ironically symbolic handshake of Rolf and Jill; the innocent puppets of the terrible fate which is drawing their two families into deathly feud. Another form of artificiality is to be found occasionally in a rather unnatural manipulation of the exits and entrances. This again is not frequent in his best plays.

Although realism is the dominant feature of Mr. Galsworthy's art, there can be no question that didacticism is its mainspring. His deep pity and regret inspired by the faults and follies and cruelties of men and society have made him an ardent reformer. In this rôle he takes up the cause of many classes of the oppressed and the sorrowful. The penal system occupies his attention in the *Silver Box* and in *Justice.* In the first he shows that whatever equality of justice there may be in theory, in practice there is only too truly one law for the rich and another for the poor. In *Justice* we are shown the unadaptable rigidity of the processes of law and the methods of prison punishment under which a tender spirit is bruised and finally crushed. In *Strife* he studies the problem of the age—the struggle between Capital and Labour ; and in *The Mob* the theme is jingoism, alive in March, 1914, when the play was first produced, though somewhat tarnished to-day as a predicatory text. In none of these plays is Mr. Galsworthy carried away by a thesis in

the manner of Mr. Shaw. He keeps the play on the human level and implies his doctrine in subtle, but effective, fashion. He characters are real people, not the talking puppets of *Man and Superman* or *Getting Married*; and they so far convince and grip that we feel first of all that the interest is human. But on reflection the impression changes and we perceive that we have been listening to a sermon very delicately, but very really, preached by one who himself feels keenly although he knows how to hide his emotions and opinions behind a mask of rigid impartiality.

The question of poverty, with its black and white corollaries of crime and charity, inspires the theme of *The Pigeon*. There is humanity in the play; but the social meaning of this question stamps the play. In *The Fugitive* it is the position of woman in society that occupies Mr. Galsworthy. It is the old theme of the drama of the age,—woman fighting for truth to life and to herself, the struggle for freedom, for self-expression. The same idea enters into *The Eldest Son*, but there it is crossed by the warp of class distinction. Freda Studdenham, Rose Taylor and Dot are all struggling daughters of Ibsen's Nora, sisters of many of Mr. Shaw's and Mr. Barker's women. The element of caste complicates, but does not alter, the text of the sermon. The younger generation is not content to submit to the thraldom of the past. It is Dot who raises the banner of revolt. Speaking with scant respect for her father she says:

> *Dot.* It's always like this, women kept in blinkers. Rose-leaves and humbug! That awful old man!
> *Joan.* Dot!
> *Christine.* Don't talk of father like that!
> *Dot.* Well, he is! And Bill will be just like him at fifty! Heaven help Freda, whatever she's done! I'd sooner be a private in a German regiment than a woman.

The theme is somewhat worn to-day, but we must bear in mind that the play was written in the year 1909 when the feminist question still burned fiercely.

Since the war the subject has been dropped by most dramatists, but Mr. Galsworthy has returned to it in *A Family Man*. In this play he deals with the problem of

parent and children, reviving and developing the theme of *The Eldest Son*.

In *The Pigeon* the idea of freedom and self-expression is treated more widely in that it is not limited to women. Ferrand, the French vagabond-philosopher, is a wild bird seeking to strain his wings to the open sky. But convention and civilization combine to cage or at least to restrain him in his desire for flight. The well-meaning reformers, each with his own theory of social amelioration, regard the three outcasts—Ferrand, Mrs. Megan and the drunken Timson—as interesting cases, but only the despised and foolish artist, Wellwyn, sees that these wretched creatures are human beings. He may be an unpractical idealist, apt to do more harm than good, but at least he does recognize these people as human beings and not merely as cases. His heart is warm, though his head may be weak ; and it is left to Ferrand, the ne'er-do-weel Frenchman, to formulate a philosophy of poverty and life. He sees the irony of the situation symbolized in the play by the internecine feud between the rival theoreticians, Professor Calway and Sir Thomas Hoxton, and the grim absurdity of things when the law, in the person of the Constable, bears away Mrs. Megan to punishment for attempted suicide. At this sight the patience of even the long-suffering Wellwyn gives way, and he bursts out :

> Well ! God in heaven ! Of all the d——d topsy-turvy——! Not a soul in the world wants her alive—and now she's to be prosecuted for trying to be where every one wishes her.

The question of caste, which complicates the problem dealt with in *The Eldest Son*, is the main theme of two of Mr. Galsworthy's later plays. In *The Skin Game* we have the struggle between the aristocratic ideal, rooted in the soil of old England, and the almost brutal energy and love of business efficiency which inspire the activity of the new class which is on the rise. The Hillcrist family has risen, but so long ago that they seem almost as if they had never risen. Hornblower, on the contrary, has made his own position : he is wealthy in material things, though he has not yet reached the stage when culture can flourish. The Hillcrists have

mellowed with time: the period of struggle is long past, and they have but to live a life of noble ease. Refinement to them is a natural efflorescence of traditional culture: they express what is best in English aristocracy. Hornblower is frankly a cad: but he has a very human heart, and he most properly resents what is in reality the unpardonable snobbery of his high-born neighbours. The struggle for the mastery evokes all that is worst in both, and finally the quarrel degenerates into a base feud in which neither stops at the meanest shifts. At the end we cannot help pitying Hornblower, broken and crushed beneath disappointment and disgrace; nor have we less regret that the nobility of the Hillcrists should lie smirched and torn by the dirty weapons which they themselves have used in the wretched fight.

A similar theme runs through one of Mr. Galsworthy's latest plays—*Loyalties*. Caste is once again the motive: the struggle is between the ideals of a wealthy young Jew and of English aristocracy embodied in the spirit of the British officer. Once again we see the opposing forces ranged in disastrous strife, which ends in the triumph of neither, but the disgrace of both. In both plays it is the pity of it all that inspires Mr. Galsworthy. He seems to tell us that he can see the good in both, and the tragedy of trying to pit one against the other, as if there were not room enough in this world for both if only human society were a little more charitable and tolerant.

The danger of Mr. Galsworthy's method is that he may be accused of arguing from the particular to the general. In such a play as *Justice* he shows the failure of the criminal system in its application to a special case. It breaks down when applied to certain individuals. But is this more than another example of the imperfection of finite humanity? Man can do no more than strive to organize society on general lines, and no human device will fit all cases. To show that there is one individual who is more hurt than benefited by a social contrivance is not proof that the contrivance is inherently bad. The same criticism may be applied to other plays, as for example *The Fugitive*, which is not a complete

condemnation of the marriage laws and conventions, because they do not meet the case of Clare Dedmond.

On the other hand, this method has the advantage of demonstrating the necessity of tempering every general law to the needs of the individual. The trouble is that when society has evolved a rule by which to regulate conduct it is too apt to think that the whole problem is solved, and to cast out all who cannot adapt themselves to the general code. In fact it is apt to mistake inability for unwillingness; whereas often enough the rebel is congenitally incapable of living by the ordinary conventional code. The result is that society is helpless in dealing with its recalcitrants; simply because it does not diagnose the psychological cause of the trouble. This is the main theme of *The Pigeon*, in which all can see the trouble only too easily but all recommend different remedies. Sir Thomas Hoxton believes in the old-fashioned method of applying a stiff dose of punishment: Professor Calway would solve the problem on lines of cool reason. But both miss the point, not because their methods are necessarily bad, but because they have little imagination and are unable to adapt themselves to the individual circumstances of the cases before them. Their failure is symbolized in the actual physical tumble that befalls each of them as they go out of the door and trip on the inanimate form of the drunken Timson lying across the threshold. As Ferrand aptly remarks, "They had lost sight of the individual." Wellwyn, on the other hand, is apt to keep his eye on the individual only, and forgets the social necessity of convention. The result is that he is likely to become a nuisance not only to his friends but to the community as a whole. Nevertheless he can teach much to the conventionalists: he has sympathy, he understands something of the mystery of life which takes so many and such varied forms. He may effect little; but at least he is not so futile as the professed reformers. Ferrand sums it up:

> *Ferrand.* (*Earnestly.*) Monsieur, do you know this? You are the sole being that can do us good—we hopeless ones.
>
> *Wellwyn.* (*Shaking his head.*) Not a bit of it; I'm hopeless too.

> *Ferrand.* (*Eagerly.*) Monsieur, it is just that. You *understand.* When we are with you we feel something—here—(*he touches his heart*). If I had one prayer to make, it would be, Good God, give me to understand! Those sirs, with their theories, they can clean our skins and chain our 'abits—that soothes for them the æsthetic sense; it gives them too their good little importance. But our spirits they cannot touch, for they nevare understand.

Mr. Galsworthy himself clearly does understand. That is why in his work the reformer, although weakening, never subdues the dramatist. He never loses sight of the individual, however general may be the topic which he propounds. Unlike the characters of Mr. Shaw, the persons of his dramas are men and women rather than mere mouthpieces for the dramatist.

A further danger besetting every writer whose aim is didactic is that his work runs the risk of losing its meaning with the passage of time. If a dramatist sets out to build his art on evils of society he may find that as society is cleansed of the ills which he is proclaiming so the *raison d'être* of his art disappears. That art will live longest which is built on the broad foundation of human nature, not on the shifting sand of conventions which here to-day are gone to-morrow.

Although Mr. Galsworthy is a didactic writer, he maintains an extraordinary impartiality when setting forth his problems. We have already seen in how many plays the two sides, which every question is reputed to possess, are embodied in different persons or groups. Some didactic writers will set up a poor creature merely as a cockshy for the rest. Mr. Galsworthy scorns such an unchivalrous game. Each side is well represented and the most that can be said for each side is said, and said almost with equal strength. No issue is settled by force, or for lack of adequate champions. In *Strife* we are shown all that can be adduced for and against each party in the industrial struggle. Against the immovable old Anthony is pitted the irreconcilable will of the men's leader, Roberts. These men are both wrong, wrong through sheer inability to compromise: each has the pellucid mind of the idealist, for whom the guiding star of a single principle seems to illumine the path of conduct with the white light of

truth. But life in fact is not so simple, and the path is not so clear. The best light we can get is but flickering and does not always reveal the rocks and pitfalls. Anthony and Roberts learn this to their cost: each perishes for his impossible ideal. Great men both; but at best splendid failures. It is the smaller, but more practical, men who have to settle the difficulties; and once again we are presented with one set of masters over against another set of workers. The balance is held true to the end, and it is only by inference that we can judge where the dramatist's own sympathies lie. In fact they lie on both sides. All men interest Mr. Galsworthy: for all he has a great sympathy. He sees that when men fight, men suffer; and he is pained by the sight of suffering. His sympathy goes to those who suffer: he feels the pity of it all so deeply that he cannot be troubled to ask through whose fault a man or a woman suffers. The tragedy is that they suffer.

This same impartiality is found in other plays in the same degree. In *The Mob* we see the nobility and the pettiness of both the jingo and the pacifist. We cannot help admiring both and regretting the weakness of both. In *Justice* the central problem of the treatment of criminals is debated with almost equal absence of bias. The pros and contras are given each a fair hearing: both sides of the question are entrusted to able advocates. In *The Skin Game* the point of view of each family is presented with even hand: the best is said for each, and the worst too. *Loyalties* shows the same unbiased presentation of those who stand for the rival ideals. The result in the last two plays is a rather tantalizing inconclusiveness. In his earlier work Mr. Galsworthy was always strictly fair; but one could see whither he was tending. In *The Skin Game* and in *Loyalties* the balance is so nicely preserved that the play ends with a mere query.

Mr. Galsworthy's restraint sometimes leads him to irony of a bitter quality. In *The Silver Box* Jack Barthwick thieves and because he is a rich man's son he is daubed plentifully with whitewash. Jones also thieves, but he is a

poor man without influence of any kind, and, although he committed the theft in circumstances of great temptation, he receives one month with hard labour. The irony of the contrast may well cause the devils to snigger; but it gnaws the heart of a man of feeling. We perceive under the cool and polished surface of the final scene that there burns a fierce glow of anger at the horrible injustice of it all. The final episode of the play takes place in the police court: this is how it ends. The Magistrate has acquitted Mrs. Jones, who turns pleadingly to him on her husband's behalf. But he cannot pass over such a crime.

Magistrate. Yes, yes, but I can't pass it over. Go away, there's a good woman.

(*Mrs. Jones stands back. The Magistrate leans his head on his hand: then raising it he speaks to Jones.*)

Now, listen to me. Do you wish the case to be settled here, or do you wish it to go before a Jury?

Jones. (*Muttering.*) I don't want no Jury.

Magistrate. Very well then, I will deal with it here. (*After a pause.*) You have pleaded guilty to stealing this Box——

Jones. Not to stealin'——

Bald Constable. Hssshh

Magistrate. And to assaulting the police——

Jones. Any man as was a man——

Magistrate. Your conduct here has been most improper. You give the excuse that you were drunk when you stole the box. I tell you that is no excuse. If you choose to get drunk and break the law afterwards you must take the consequences. And let me tell you that men like you, who get drunk and give way to your spite or whatever it is that's in you, are—are—a *nuisance to the community.*

Jack. (*Leaning from his seat.*) Dad! that's what you said to me?

Barthwick. Tsst.

(*There is a silence, while the Magistrate consults his Clerk; Jones leans forward waiting.*

Magistrate. This is your first offence, and I am going to give you a light sentence. (*Speaking sharply, but without expression.*) One month with hard labour.

(*He bends, and parleys with his Clerk. The Bald Constable and another help Jones from the dock.*

Jones. (*Stopping and twisting round.*) Call this justice? What about 'im? 'E got drunk! 'E took the purse—'e took the purse but (*in a muffled shout*) it's *'is money* got *'im* off——. *Justice!*

(*The prisoner's door is shut on Jones, and from the seedy-looking men and women comes a hoarse and whispering groan.*

Magistrate. We will now adjourn for lunch ! (*He rises from his seat.*)

(*The Court is in a stir. Roper gets up and speaks to the reporter. Jack, throwing up his head, walks with a swagger to the corridor ; Barthwick follows.*

Mrs. Jones. (*Turning to him with a humble gesture.*) Oh ! Sir !——

(*Barthwick hesitates, then yielding to his nerves he makes a shame-faced gesture of refusal, and hurries out of Court. Mrs. Jones stands looking after him.*

The curtain falls.

Precisely analogous is the contrast of cases in *The Eldest Son*. It is one thing for Sir William Cheshire to insist that his under-gamekeeper shall marry the girl in the village whom he has compromised. For a man of his high moral standards it is essential that he shall play his part in forcing his dependants to maintain the morality of the neighbourhood. When he discovers that his son and the heir to the baronetcy has behaved in precisely similar fashion with Lady Cheshire's maid his outlook suffers rapid change. Bill is anxious to marry Freda, but Sir William, crushed by the catastrophe, is concerned to do all he can to save his son and still more the family name from the contumely which such a step would surely involve. The poor old man cuts a lamentable figure in this terrible plight : he learns his lesson in a hard school.

Even more mordant is the ironical ending of *The Mob*. Stephen More, the idealistic pacifist, is hounded to his death by an insensate mob of so-called patriots. In the mêlée which follows his meeting he is stabbed and killed. Then follows the final scene called *Aftermath* :

A late Spring dawn is just breaking. Against trees in leaf and blossom, with the houses of a London Square beyond, suffused by the spreading glow, is seen a dark life-size statue on a granite pedestal. In front is the broad, dust-dim pavement. The light grows till the central words around the pedestal can be clearly read :

ERECTED
To the Memory
of
STEPHEN MORE
" Faithful to his ideal "

High above, the face of Move looks straight before him with a faint smile. On one shoulder, and on his bare head two sparrows have perched, and from the gardens, behind, come the twittering and singing of birds.

The curtain falls.

It recalls the dénouement of Mr. Barker's *Waste*. It is the unnecessary loss of a good man that is so pitiful. The world has few enough to save it : the tragedy of the ages has been that men will stone their prophets.

Perhaps the most bitterly ironical ending to any of Mr. Galsworthy's plays is to be found in *Strife*. On each side of this industrial struggle an unyielding idealist has urged on his followers. Anthony, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the tin-plate concern, has refused to budge an inch : Roberts, burning with a sense of the wrongs of his class, leads the men with fierce enthusiasm but with a fixed determination to make no compromise. War is declared, and waged. The strike goes on, bringing misery in its train : women die, children starve ; the men are being slowly ground to dust. Counsels of reconciliation and reason are put forward by the more moderate men on each side : but the ardent idealists insist on fighting to death or victory. Mr. Galsworthy wants to show, what the whole world has learned since in a harder trial, that warfare brings no victory, only varying degrees of defeat. The strike goes on until human endurance can hold out no longer : then the extremists are thrown over by their followers and a compromise is effected. Old Anthony is a broken man : all that he held sacred, in his wrong-headed fashion, has been torn from him. Roberts has sacrificed his all : he has given even his wife's life to the cause ; she has died of starvation. Now he is thrown over by his fellows. What a glorious victory ! The play ends with this commentary by Harness, the trade union official, and Tench, the secretary of the company :

Harness. A woman dead ; and the two best men both broken !

(*Underwood enters suddenly.*

Tench. (*Staring at Harness—suddenly excited.*) D'you know, Sir—these terms, they're the *very same* we drew up together,

you and I, and put to both sides before the fight began? All this—all this—and—and what for?

Harness. (*In a slow grim voice.*) That's where the fun comes in!

(*Underwood without turning from the door makes a gesture of assent.*

The curtain falls.

The effect of this irony and inconclusiveness is to produce deep gloom in many of Mr. Galsworthy's plays. In certain of his plays the dénouement is tragic in the accepted sense of the term: that is, the end is marked by the death of one of the central figures. Thus *Justice*, *The Fugitive*, *The Mob*, *The Skin Game*, *Loyalties*. But even where death does not ring down the curtain the ending often leaves us shrouded in gloom, with that atmosphere of irony which we have seen already. In *The Pigeon*, with its attempt at comedy, we are left with a sad sense of the futility of it all. Nevertheless, there is a streak of hope on the horizon if we will look carefully enough. Mr. Galsworthy is essentially an optimist, because he never gives way to the blasphemy for which there is no forgiveness: he interprets human sorrow not in terms of a whimsical, malign fate, but as the result of human weakness. Humanity is frail but capable of salvation: the tragedy that he depicts springs from remediable causes. Therein lies hope, the hope that inspires every reformer. The effect of *Justice* and *The Silver Box* is at first depressing, but in the long run tonic; for we realize that the evils it depicts are unnecessary and can exist only so long as we are content to allow their causes to remain. The tragedy of *Strife* could not be possible if society faced the facts of industrial evils and applied the remedy. Only a foolish human convention suffers the cruel absurdity which dealt death to Stephen More; and even already one feels that the day for such crass, militant jingoism is past. So too the day will come when our attitude to questions of sex and marriage will make such plays as *The Eldest Son* and *The Fugitive* seem antiquated. In so far as his protagonists are the victims of remediable social evils, Mr. Galsworthy is essentially an optimist.

Mr. Galsworthy's excursions into the field of humour are

designed to lighten and brighten ; but they are not always very successful. The fact is that he is a serious commentator on life, whose vision is so much occupied with the sombre and pitiful aspect of things that he has neither the outlook nor the capacity which make for successful humour. *Joy* was an early attempt at humour, which is far from being successful. The characters are essentially characters of the stage and their motions lack the ease of life which is necessary for true humour. The efforts at comic relief in such characters as Mrs. Miler, the charwoman in *The Fugitive*, or Mrs. Jones, who says " of course " with tiring persistence in *The Silver Box*, are somewhat heavy. The humorous quality of some of the rustics and the Rector's wife in *A Bit o' Love* are conceived more happily, but though they have a more natural quality they are slight characters, and mainly derive from the traditional stock of the dramatists. A more productive vein of comedy is worked in *The Pigeon* ; but even here the sense of futility, to which we have referred, prevents more than a smile. Furthermore the comedy is conveyed through very formal characters, such as the quarrelling experts, and the absurdly generous Wellwyn. In one or two trifles Mr. Galsworthy has been more successful in comedy, such as *The Little Man* and *Hall-Marked* ; but here again the flavour is subacid and seriousness peeps through the mask of laughter. The same quality marks what is perhaps his most consistent comic effort, *The Foundations*. The intention is not less didactic than in any of the tragedies and serious plays, but for the nonce Mr. Galsworthy seems to have donned the mantle of Mr. Shaw in the hope of bringing society to see its faults and follies in a spirit of laughter. Yet even here the laughter lacks radiance : it is rather the cachinnation of a malicious sprite who sees the shallowness of the transitory sympathy which drew the classes and the masses together during the stress of war fright, but which, as Mr. Galsworthy foresaw clearly in 1917, would relapse into the old selfish struggle when the war cloud had passed. The form and setting are, however, truly comic.

When we come to estimate Mr. Galsworthy's position as a dramatist and to assess his work as a whole we are thrown back on first principles. And as is always the case in discussing first principles we must speak in terms of dogma, which in its turn rests ultimately on faith. Nor can we get further back than the old statement that tragedy is conflict. It may be the conflict of man with his own nature or the nature of his fellow man, as Shakespeare showed it in *King Lear* and *Othello* ; or it may be the conflict of man with fate embodied or symbolized as an external force, as in *Macbeth* ; or it may be the conflict of man with what seems to be the insuperable force of external circumstance as in *Hamlet.* In each and every case it is really and essentially the struggle between the opposing forces that range themselves in the man himself, although superficially it may seem to be the fight of a man against his environment. This is a first necessity of tragedy ; but there is another if the tragedy is to be great. Great tragedy is the unsuccessful struggle of a great soul. The protagonist will in the nature of things have his flaw, his fatal weakness ; but he must not be small, nor must he disgust us. This does not mean that he need be socially great or even obviously great. The artist may succeed in exhibiting real greatness in the humblest and obscurest character. Yet another essential quality of tragedy is that it shall be inevitable. That effect of terror which Aristotle rightly demanded from tragedy will not rise in the breast if the ending is accidental. It may be unfortunate if a great man is pushed under a train by a jostling crowd on a station platform ; it may have dire consequences on the community which he serves : but it is not tragic in the sense that the inevitable fall of a great soul like that of Macbeth or Hamlet is tragic.

Judged by these standards how is Mr. Galsworthy's art to be estimated ? To begin with we find only too frequently that his protagonists are essentially small creatures like the wretched Falder, in *Justice,* or like poor Freda in *The Eldest Son.* Of Bill Cheshire in the same play can we say that he is less than despicable ? The same condemnation is due to

Hornblower in *The Skin Game*, and it is scarcely unjust to regard his antagonist Hillcrist in the same light. There can be no doubt about Mrs. Hillcrist's meanness. The play is a play of mean souls, though none of them is so untruthful to nature as to be utterly despicable. In *Loyalties* we are once again shown the petty animosity of unseeing human creatures. It is alas very natural; but the vendetta between Jew and Gentile, the struggle between De Levis and the opposing force of Christian Englishmen, and the base criminality and falsehood of Captain Dancy, D.S.O., make a very humiliating and unedifying spectacle. It may be sanative, but it is not great art.

It may be urged that in Sir William and Lady Cheshire, in *The Eldest Son*, we have an English lady and gentleman who embody some of the best qualities of our tradition and culture. Even that hardly suffices to make a great tragedy out of the ordinary meanness of the immediate instruments of the disaster, and even they themselves, who alone approach the level of tragedy, are not great enough to make great tragedy. A far greater character than either Sir William or Lady Cheshire is Stephen More in *The Mob*. But he is too wooden to be really great, and a serious flaw in the play is the accidental nature of More's death. We can scarcely believe in the cause of his death, stabbed as he is after making a pacifist speech by an hysterical girl who has lost her lover in war. Nor are we convinced that his wife, whatever may be the military tradition of her family, would have deserted him because of his political views.

Clare Dedmond in *The Fugitive* is nearly a tragic figure and the suicide which ends her wretched career is clearly inevitable. Yet somehow it misses being effective tragedy. It has too much in common with the sordid drama of the class of *Hedda Gabler* and Sir Arthur Pinero's *Iris*. Another striking figure in Mr. Galsworthy's drama is Michael Strangway in *A Bit o' Love*. This play, with its rural setting and Devonshire flavour, is exceptional in many respects. The deserted parson is a high-souled, earnest man of the Stephen More type. His, however, is a more human character: he

breathes of life rather than merely of the theatre. The play is not tragic in the orthodox sense that it ends in death : but it contains all the elements of tragedy. Strangway would have committed suicide but for the chance of being baulked at the last moment : but in the end he learns a better way. That love for which his soul thirsted came to him unexpectedly and he found a path of service which he could tread contentedly if not cheerfully.

There can be no doubt that the play in which Mr. Galsworthy has reached the greatest height is his comparatively early drama *Strife*, which was first produced so long ago as 1909. It is needless to recount the outline of the plot of which sufficient indication has already been given. In many of his plays the characters either lack vitality or at best do not impress themselves on the imagination. A Hornblower or a De Levis make their mark through mere unpleasantness and a touch of the unusual ; but in *Strife* at least two persons stand out and impress themselves indelibly on the imagination and on the memory. Anthony, on the one hand, and his antagonist Roberts one cannot forget. They are great creations and the play which turns on the strife of which they are the storm centres is unquestionably great drama.

Occasionally Mr. Galsworthy's pity is apt to degenerate into sentimentalism. This is especially marked in his treatment of child characters. It is a notorious fact that few if any dramatists have succeeded in creating a real child character in a play which depends for its main characters on adults. Shakespeare tried it and failed ; Ibsen was hardly more successful : and where they failed Mr. Galsworthy has not achieved. He frequently introduces children. They appear in *The Mob*, in *The Silver Box*, in *Joy* ; but in none are they convincing. The children in *A Bit o' Love* are more vital ; but the only really successful treatment of childhood is in *The Little Man*, in which the baby, too young to speak and not even seen by the audience, so carefully is it swaddled, is nevertheless an integral part of the play and unnatural only in that it does not cry.

Lastly a word must be said on the subject of Mr. Galsworthy's craftsmanship. Although his plays are full of thought and substance, although he rarely brightens them with humour, they can generally command an audience. One reason certainly is that they are exceedingly well-made plays. Few dramatists to-day know the technique of the theatre as well as Mr. Galsworthy. He is familiar with the stage and understands what can be done on it and how to do it. He also makes his plays thoroughly interesting. There is plenty of incident and often that incident is exciting. He has learned much from the devices of melodrama or of what is called "strong drama," though he has the artistic restraint which prevents him from committing the absurdities that we connect with those genres. He knows the attractiveness of the dramatic *tour de force*; and his meticulous realism enables him to execute wonderfully telling effects of the kind. What but *tours de force* are the strike meeting in *Strife*, the trial scene in *Justice*, the auction sale, so thrillingly exciting, in *The Skin Game?*

It is therefore easy to see why Mr. Galsworthy is so notable a figure in the eye of the playgoing public to-day. Nor does he deserve anything less than popularity, for his work is always good. His artistic ideals are always maintained at a high level, and his purpose is ever noble. He has written many interesting and many good plays; but has he written many great plays? *Strife* is a great work of art; but he has never equalled it. Surely Mr. Galsworthy has it in him even to surpass it; but he will need to tear himself from those problems of little human creatures and concentrate his whole art once again not mainly on the social problem but primarily on the soul of man. Then he may give us even greater human creations than Clare or Strangway or Stephen More, even than Anthony and David Roberts. The machine of justice may run creakily and the crushing of frail mortals beneath its cruel weight may be pathetic; society may break many a tender butterfly on its revolving wheel; human pettiness may damage many a beautiful and helpless soul. More's the pity: and we need to be told it all and told

it oft ; for human imagination is so dull that we forget what is not constantly before our eyes. But that is work for the moralist and the reformer, and woe betide the artist whose pitying eye and sympathetic heart are caught in the fatal web of didacticism. Let the artist interpret life truly and in the highest sense beautifully and there will be no fear that he will not do good. The preacher and the reformer have their functions ; and the artist has his. In the end they are aiming all at the same great object, to raise and beautify and enrich life. But although their ultimate aim may be one, their paths are different, and so too must they use different means.

CHAPTER XII

THE IRISH PIONEERS

1. YEATS

It was a notable feature of the Irish literary revival that its form should have been primarily poetic. No name stands out more prominently in the story of the revival than that of Mr. W. B. Yeats, whose own contribution has been fine in quality and wide in scope. This is no place to re-tell the almost romantic story of that revival, of the foundation by Mr. Yeats and others of the National Literary Society in 1892 with its splendid object—to "spread a tradition of life that makes neither great wealth nor great poverty, that makes the arts a national expression of life, that permits every common man to understand good art and high thinking and to have the fine manners these things can give." The movement took root and developed, and in 1899 was founded the Irish Literary Theatre. In 1903 this became the Irish National Theatre Society and in the next year Miss Horniman placed at the disposal of the Society the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, which was to be the cradle and the home of modern Irish drama. From it there sprang up not only a band of real dramatists but a company of first-rate players. Even the shortest account of the modern Irish dramatic revival must include a tribute to the art of Miss Sara Allgood, Miss Maire O'Neill, Mr. Arthur Sinclair, and the other members of the Abbey stock company.

The direct contribution of Mr. Yeats as a dramatist is not the most important thing he gave to the Irish literary revival; but it is what we are concerned with here. Mr.

Yeats is first and last a poet, and his drama is always subject to the poetic influence which commands his whole work. It is not merely that the greater part of his drama is written in verse: the essence of his work is poetic, inspired by the lyrical sense and impregnated with symbolical and mystical fancy. The leading theme of his work is that high quest for beauty which is the prime object of all poetry, indeed of all art. As a seer of beautiful visions, or, shall we say, of visions of the beautiful, he is never weary of celebrating the poet and his vocation. In *The King's Threshold* the poet hero takes up the challenge of a practical, materialistic world and is prepared to vindicate his high calling even by death itself. He rejects all the mean substitutes that the world offers and fights for nothing less than recognition as one of the world's great ones. If the King will not grant him the honour that appertains by right to the vocation of poet he will die on the King's threshold. In the end he triumphs over the world's blandishments and by the strength of his determination he forces the King to restore him to his former position of honour.

In other plays the scope of the idea is widened into a struggle between the material and the spiritual elements of life, the actual and the imaginative, the world which is open to the physical eye and that vast unbounded region visible only to the penetrative eye of imagination and faith. This was the theme of his first, and perhaps his greatest, play, *The Countess Cathleen*. Shemus, the peasant, and his son, Teig, are creatures of coarse clay. Hunger makes them grossly carnal and they sell their souls for bread. Mary, the mother, has more spiritual qualities: she holds to her religion although her body dies of starvation. The two Merchants, who go up and down the land purchasing souls for food, are embodied demons. They find many ready to traffic with them, but they are not content till they can acquire the soul of the Countess herself. Cathleen, heart-broken at the loss of her people's souls, decides on a high act of renunciation and sells her own. She demands a great price, but so keenly do the Merchants desire to buy that she

can impose her own terms. She barters her pure soul for the price of the souls of her folk. Thus she wins them back from perdition and saves herself by this supreme sacrifice. Her body dies, but we learn from the Angel of her re-birth into everlasting life :

> The light beats down ; the gates of pearl are wide.
> And she is passing to the floor of peace,
> And Mary of the seven times wounded heart
> Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair
> Has fallen on her face ; The Light of Lights
> Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
> The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.

The Countess Cathleen was first published in 1892 and was acted in 1899. In 1894 was acted at the Avenue Theatre, London, *The Land of Heart's Desire*, another play on this theme—the conflict of the material world and the imaginative. Mary Bruin, a young bride, yearns for freedom of the spirit and chafes within the round of commonplace life. A Faery Child calls her to a land of eternal youth and laughter, and despite the chains of religion and human love she is drawn away by the soulless spirit of joy. The poet indicates the opposition between the dull materialism of human existence and the world of faery, the Land of Heart's Desire, that land where :

> The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
> The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
> And the lonely of heart is withered away ;
> While the faeries dance in a place apart,
> Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
> Tossing their milk-white arms in the air ;
> For they hear the wind laugh and murmur and sing
> Of a land where even the old are fair,
> And even the wise are merry of tongue.

He also indicates the danger of these specious attractions which with the promise of freedom and untrammelled life lure the spirit of youth to eventual destruction. It is an old idea, but Mr. Yeats is justified by the exquisite grace and lyrical beauty with which he has restated this undying theme.

In *The Hour Glass* we see the struggle between religion and rationalism. The rationalistic scholar eventually is

saved by the Fool who has learned the truth of religion " alone on the hills " where he has communed with the angels. Mr. Yeats ironically accepts the world's verdict that it is the fools who hold simple converse with actual spiritual beings. He would not hesitate to class himself with the fools, who include such men as William Blake and the other mystics to whom Mr. Yeats owes so much of his philosophy and belief.

His mysticism is expressed very clearly in *Shadowy Waters*. A belief in the reality of absolute beauty, of the substantial existence within the limits of time and space of " what the world's million lips are thirsting for " underlies this little play. In this case it is the power of love which entices men and women from the world of actuality. He depicts ideal love as the apotheosis of life. It is an invincible force, captivating Forgael and Dectora, as it had captivated Tristram and Iseult, Lancelot and Guinevere, Antony and Cleopatra, indeed the great lovers of all ages who had daffed the world aside for their supreme passion. Forgael and Dectora bid farewell to their companions, and cutting themselves off irrevocably from life and mankind they drift away into the fading western light on the shadowy waters of love.

In all the plays considered above the theme is the reality of the spiritual world. The other leading motive of Mr. Yeats's drama is Irish nationalism. In every one of his plays the setting and atmosphere are Irish, and in many he depends for his dramatic machinery on the folk-lore or mythology of Ireland. *Countess Cathleen* and *The Land of Heart's Desire* turn on the popular belief, extant to this day, in the ' little people.' In *Deirdre* he takes the ancient Irish heroic myth with its grandeur and tragic nobility which have attracted so many of his contemporaries. *On Baile's Strand*, another tragedy, and a curious trifle, *The Green Helmet*, which Mr. Yeats calls ' an heroic farce,' are also framed on heroic legend.

The Green Helmet is touched with the humour of the satirist, but it is in *The Pot of Broth* that Mr. Yeats has displayed his sense of humour most convincingly. It is a

pleasant thrust at the imaginative credulity, which so often degenerates into gullibility in his compatriots. This salient foible of the Irishman, a faculty for believing what he wants to believe, was to be exploited on a great scale by Synge. The plot is further interesting as an example of Mr. Yeats's ability to make drama out of the ordinary life of the folk. The play is in prose, as indeed are some others of his, and is more realistic in manner than the rest of his work.

Another play which stands more or less by itself is the beautiful *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. This very short drama, in prose, breathes the political aspirations of nationalist Ireland. The scene is laid in a cottage in the fateful year 1798. Preparations are forward for the impending marriage of Michael Gillane and Delia Cahel. The Gillanes, who have mercenary minds, are discussing the practical question of the dowry which their son may expect with his wife. Into this everyday scene there enters an old woman. She is Cathleen Ni Houlihan, symbolical of the spirit of aspirant Ireland. With her riddling words and mysterious crooning song, which fall dead on the dull ears of these peasants, she catches the imagination and inflames the heart of Michael. It is not the pence or the milk or the oaten cake which they proffer that she wants. It is not even silver which can satisfy her need.

> *Old Woman.* This is not what I want. It is not silver I want.
> *Peter.* What is it you would be asking for ?
> *Old Woman.* If anyone would give me help he must give me himself, he must give me all.

Michael understands. " I will go with you," he says simply. She has won him, another son in the cause of freedom, and she raises her voice in tragic prophecy :

> It is a hard service they take that help me. Many that are red-cheeked now will be pale-cheeked ; many that have been free to walk the hills and the bogs and the rushes, will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries ; many a good plan will be broken ; many that have gathered money will not stay to spend it ; many a child will be born and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name. They that have red cheeks will

have pale cheeks for my sake, and for all that, they will think they are well paid.

(*She goes out; her voice is heard outside singing.*)

They shall be remembered for ever,
They shall be alive for ever,
They shall be speaking for ever,
The people shall hear them for ever.

Michael is bewitched: the world is slipping away from his grasp. Forgetful of his wedding, unconscious of his lover, he is aroused only by the news that the French are landing at Killala. In vain Delia clings to him.

Peter. It's no use. He doesn't hear a word we're saying.

Bridget. Try and coax him over to the fire.

Delia. Michael, Michael! You won't leave me! You won't join the French, and we going to be married!

(*She puts her arms about him, he turns towards her as if about to yield.*)

Old Woman's voice outside.

They shall be speaking for ever,
The people shall hear them for ever.

(*Michael breaks away from Delia, stands for a second at the door, then rushes out, following the Old Woman's voice. Bridget takes Delia, who is crying silently, into her arms.*)

Peter. (*To Patrick, laying a hand on his arm.*) Did you see an old woman going down the path?

Patrick. I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen.

Curtain.

Many of Mr. Yeats's plays are apt to lack movement and incident: they are beautiful talk. There is scarcely any action in *The King's Threshold* or *The Hour Glass* or *Shadowy Waters*, and even *Deirdre*, except for its wonderfully stirring climax, has little action. But in *Countess Cathleen*, *The Land of Heart's Desire*, and especially in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* the dramatic quality is strong. The first two owe much of their effect to mere lyrical beauty, but the poetry cannot be separated from the action. In this respect they stand on a level much higher than any other of Mr. Yeats's plays. The fact is however that he is essentially a lyrical poet: his imagination moves amidst beautiful ideas rather than in the world of men. He has little power, or at any rate little inclination, to create human character; and without that power no dramatist

can put his art to its supreme purpose. Even Deirdre and her lover, Naisi, remain shadowy figures, though they are perhaps the most living characters that Mr. Yeats has created, unless we assign to that place the skilfully portrayed Tramp in *The Pot of Broth.*

A further qualification must be made in regard to Mr. Yeats's verse in certain of his plays. In *The Countess Cathleen* and *The Land of Heart's Desire* the verse is often richly beautiful and generally adequate; but it must be confessed that in several of his plays the blank verse at times is dull and even halting. As is natural this banality of verse is more frequent in the early part of a play: as the plot unrolls and the emotional theme develops the verse rises in intensity. But even *Deirdre,* which contains so much that is beautiful, has many mediocre lines.

Mr. Yeats suffers as a dramatist from the defects of his merits as a poet. He will be remembered as a lyrist capable of embodying in fine verse and with lovely symbolism the subleties of his mystical thought. This quality is not wholly advantageous to a dramatist; and in effect Mr. Yeats's plays are apt to be so strange in thought and so vague in expression that the meaning is difficult to grasp. For the ordinary person this tendency to obscurity is increased by the unfamiliar imagery and the frequent allusions to a strange mythology in which the plays abound.

Latterly Mr. Yeats has become more and more rapt by a sense of mystical beauty. At the same time he has been largely influenced as a dramatist by the Nō plays of Japan. They appeal to him by their conventionality and artificiality and serve him as models for a species of drama new to the English language and, it must be admitted, foreign to the English mind. There can be no question that the simple but accurate formalism of these plays gives scope for certain effects which our traditional stage and drama preclude. The performer is less of an actor than a poised utterance. Rhythm of design and movement replaces realistic histrionic representation, and the poet consequently has a directer means of conveying the lyrical beauty of his idea. The

individuality of the player on our stage is apt to act as a barrier between artist and audience. Here his features are hidden behind a mask and his action is confined to the conventional movement of the dance. If this *genre* is foreign to an ordinary audience it satisfies Mr. Yeats's increasing esoterism which means much to him and to a select circle of initiates ; but to the plain man his *Four Plays for Dancers* are, to say the least, elusive. In cultivating his art in this narrow field Mr. Yeats realizes that he is setting caviare before the general. He sees that common folk will not and indeed cannot follow his super-subtle attempts to catch the fringe of the garment of ideal Beauty ; therefore he spurns the common folk. Without lament he has abandoned the unseeing multitude and he confesses that in " writing these plays, intended for some fifty people in a drawing-room or a studio, I have so rejoiced in my freedom from the stupidity of an ordinary audience . . ." It is a tragic avowal and it surely spells the ruin of Mr. Yeats as a dramatist. Drama is above all the arts a co-operative effort and it is greatest when its roots are planted firmly in the soil of common life. The artist may rarefy and transform common life until it is irradiated with the spirit of beauty, but when he loses contact with plain humanity his art is cut off from its source of nourishment. Such alas ! seems to be the fate which has overtaken Mr. Yeats the dramatist. It is no condemnation of these plays that their form is incomprehensible to the ordinary man, but it is a serious thing if they are made not of real human stuff but of the unreal imaginings of a visionary. Such they seem to be to the uninitiated philistine. If that is a just estimate they will be parched and shrivelled and forgotten when centuries hence the humanity of Hamlet and Falstaff is still stirring men and women to honest tears and laughter, when the joy of Ariel and the wistful pathos of Lear's Fool will prompt the blood and soothe the heart. Real art is a lamp that time can only nourish. Symbolism may be its flame, a subtle light illuminating true and beautiful ideas which wilt in the glare of the sun ; but unless the ideas are true and are beautiful, unless they are essentially

real, it is but a will o' the wisp leading only to bottomless quags.

However limited may be the dramatic powers of Mr. Yeats or the appeal which his plays are likely to make to a common audience, it is quite impossible to ignore the merit of his work and the importance of its influence on the Irish Theatre. He has been an inspiration and a guide to younger men, but it is perhaps in their work rather than his own that we shall find his greatest contribution to the modern drama.

2. MARTYN

The Irish Literary Theatre was founded by Mr. Yeats in conjunction with a few other enthusiasts. From the start Mr. Edward Martyn and Lady Gregory were valuable coadjutors, and the little band of enthusiasts were soon to be strengthened by the adhesion of Mr. George Moore. Mr. George Moore's dramatic contribution was not considerable, nor was it typically Irish, but the work of both Mr. Martyn and Lady Gregory was important.

Mr. Martyn's early *Tale of a Town* was not an auspicious start. It is no more than a transference to Ireland of the new realistic method which was becoming prevalent in England in the last decade of the nineteenth century. He treats of the petty snobbery in the social life of an Irish provincial town and lays bare the base motives and corruption which defile the stream of municipal affairs. But the characters are stiff-jointed puppets and the dialogue gives the impression of unreality. The play was unacceptable for performance; but it was rewritten by Mr. George Moore, and after undergoing metamorphosis it was produced by the Irish Literary Theatre in 1900 under the title of *The Bending of the Bough*.

Mr. Martyn's first real dramatic contribution was *The Heather Field* (1899), one of the earliest plays to be produced by the Irish Literary Theatre. In writing this play Mr. Martyn shows himself to be strongly moved by two influences. He is inspired by Irish nationalism, but he is also under

the spell of Ibsen. The play deals with the life of the Irish gentry, those men who have for so long struggled with the hard agrarian conditions of a land divided against itself politically and depressed by economic difficulties. The drama of Mr. Yeats was set amidst the poetic figures of Irish folk-lore and heroic myth, Lady Gregory and Synge were to make popular the simple folk of the western isles and mountains, but Mr. Martyn in the early days of the revival used the life of the squireen and depicted it with a certain degree of realism. At the same time his imagination was not stifled by realism and a fanciful element runs through his work. He was to some extent under the spell of Irish folk-lore, and this influence was reinforced by the poetical symbolism of Ibsen.

Carden Tyrrell, the central figure of *The Heather Field*, is an idealist. Poetic in temperament he sees the ideal of beauty beyond mundane things and he tries to realize it. The ideal is symbolized by his heather field, a waste mountain side which he has spent his wealth to reduce to pasturage. Ireland is impoverished : and the rocks stare from her fields, the heather flourishes and the grass languishes. She needs sons who love her and have the imagination and the faith to risk all on her behalf. Carden believes that rich grass can spring where heather cumbers the ground. His belief becomes an ideal ; under the opposition of his harder-headed and more practical wife and neighbours his ideal becomes an obsession and finally a mania. Slowly his money slips away : expense is added to expense and his financial difficulties crowd in on him. The final blow is not the foreclosing of the mortgages which burden his estate ; what crushes him is a handful of flowers. His little son, Kit, comes in gay from the sun and the wind and gives him a bunch of heather plucked from the heather field. The luxuriant pasturage is reverting to its native wildness : all his effort has been futile, and the blow is greater than he can bear. To have spent his estate seemed a little thing, but to realize that his ideal was vanity is overwhelming, and his mind is engulfed in the dark waters of madness.

The symbolism of the play is double in its meaning. Indirectly it suggests the hopes and fears for Erin which inspired the ardent spirits of the day ; but the picture has a wider significance. It is the universal human story of the man who is absorbed by an ideal. Strong in devotion to his purpose he will give all. So long as the issue is undecided he can bear the vicissitudes of fortune, buoyed on his bladder of hope. Destroy his faith in his ideal and despair overwhelms him.

The romantic element is enhanced by Tyrrell's love for his younger brother, Miles, who has been at once brother and son to him. His own son, Kit, is as it were a reincarnation of the boy brother of earlier years. The play is tinged deeply with sentiment which is embodied chiefly in this strong love for the brother on whom Tyrrell leans for emotional and spiritual support, and in his affection for his good friend and neighbour, Barry Ussher. The emotional element is given an appearance of falsity by the stilted, unreal dialogue in which it is conveyed. Mr. Martyn has not the power of making his characters live and express their character through natural speech. The dialogue does not proceed inevitably from the emotions and human nature from which it is supposed to spring. The consequence is to rob the play of the vitality essential for true drama.

Despite all these strictures one must grant the significance and importance of the play. It was the work of a man intent rather on studying the verities of human nature than on constructing an effective *pièce de théâtre*. Moreover the dramatist was a man with the poet's soul and outlook. He had studied Ibsen and he had seen beneath the hard surface of the realist and the satirist the poet's soul throbbing in unison with the mysterious and the beautiful element of life. He had drawn inspiration less from *Hedda Gabler* than from *The Lady from the Sea* ; the poet of *Rosmersholm* rather than the satirist of *The Pillars of Society* prompted him : and he strove, though with only partial success, to extract beauty from the ordinary life which contemporary English dramatists regarded as plain matter of fact.

In *Maeve* (1900) the same characteristics are to be found. Here, however, Mr. Martyn took even greater liberties and gave still more rein to his poetic fancy. Queen Maeve, of legendary fame, and her fairy band actually appear in the play. Once more he contrasts the idealism of the visionary and the practical values of the ordinary worldling. As in *The Heather Field* the symbolism has a double significance. Maeve O'Heynes is inspired with love of Ireland and love of real beauty : Queen Maeve with her train is the incarnate spirit of Irish poetry and typifies the idea of super-sensuous beauty. This fairy Queen of eld sits eternally buried yet eternally alive in the grassy cairn. The keynote of the play is in Maeve O'Heynes's confession :

> . . . I see them now, and I see others who lived long before them, and are buried in that green cairn. Oh, I am dying because I am exiled from such beauty.

Maeve's sister, Finola, and her broken-down father stand for the world to which idealism and a longing for absolute beauty are the foolish vanities of a morbid imagination. These plays both depict the eternal struggle between the world of reality and the world of imagination, the call of human life and the call of faery In *The Land of Heart's Desire* Mr. Yeats treats of a similar theme, but in that play he also emphasizes the further popular Irish belief in the soullessness of the fairy world : it is a world of eternal joy, but of a joy from which the soul and religion are banished. What Mr. Martyn desires to show is the beauty and the spirituality of life which lie beyond the limits of our ordinary senses ; he would have us catch a glimpse of the light that never was on sea or land. As Mr. George Moore says in his preface to the printed edition of these two plays, underlying the superficial facts which they present is the idea of " that silvery beauty which survives in the human heart, which we see shimmering to the horizon, leading our longings beyond the world, and we hear it in our hearts like silver harps and strings, sounding seemingly of themselves, for no hand is by. The morning light, the hoar frost, the moonlight wandering among the mountains are the natural symbols

of this divine beauty. Therefore Maeve is made of moonlight and hoar frost and light of morning. We do not discover her among our acquaintances, but everyone discovers her when he wills to do so in his own heart." This is the eternal theme of the poet. Mr. Martyn played his part in directing the Irish drama towards the realm of poetry.

In *The Heather Field* we have noticed that the poetic intention is apt to be frustrated by the realistic method; but in *Maeve* the play moves on an imaginative plane with the result that the effect is less incongruous. *An Enchanted Sea* (1902) has qualities in common with both those plays. Again we have the attempt to blend supernaturalism and realism, with incongruity as the result. This play is even more deeply indebted to Ibsen than its predecessors. Guy Font, the youthful squire, is not wholly human: he has fairy blood in his veins. The spirit of the waves holds him in thrall, like Ibsen's Lady from the Sea; and when he is drowned by the murderous act of his aunt he seems to be returning to a natural element. As in the preceding plays the interest rests on the romanticism with which the theme is saturated. The spirit of Irish folk-lore inspires the play: Lord Mask, young and imaginative, feeds his fancy on fairy myth like Maeve O'Heynes. The spirit of youth, which in much of the work of the Irish renaissance symbolizes the buoyant hopefulness of Erin's sons, is embodied in the wistful beauty of Lord Mask's friendship with Guy, the fairy lad; as in *The Heather Field* it irradiates the love of Carden Tyrrell for his brother Miles. Yet withal the characters are unreal and lifeless; and, although there is an element of crudely violent incident in the murder of Guy, the discovery of the crime and the suicide of his brutal aunt, the play lacks dramatic situations.

In his later work Mr. Martyn turned more and more to realism. *The Place Hunters* (1902) and *Grangecolman* (1912) are drab and rather dull stories of modern Ireland. *Grangecolman* depicts the sunless interior of an Irish country house, where the human spirit is stifled by misunderstanding and disappointment. It is a Heartbreak House in which the

soul is choked for lack of a healthy breath of life. The picture reminds one of the nerveless, ineffective humanity that gasps out a merely negative existence in such a play as Tchekhov's *Cherry Orchard*. The catastrophic end of Catherine when she is shot by Clare Farquhar is momentarily thrilling, but it leaves the emotions unmoved. The characterization is stronger and the dialogue is more closely related to persons than is usual in Mr. Martyn's plays, but there is so much querulous talk that we welcome the end as a term to our fatigue.

The Dream Physician (1914) has certain qualities in common with the earlier plays; but it shows new characteristics. It is partly comic, but intermingled with comic absurdity are wistful pathos and a psychic, mysterious element that carry the mind back to *An Enchanted Sea*. It is a play of dreamers both comic and tragic, who in the end are all awakened from their dreams to the truth of actuality.

Mr. Martyn's work cannot be overlooked; yet it cannot claim to be highly significant in the development of the Irish drama. It was important as an assertion of beauty and imagination, and to that extent it was similar in its import to the work of Mr. Yeats; but it missed the mark because of its ineffective form and manner. Poetry established its sway over the Irish drama; imagination was given full scope. But the cause was won not by Mr. Martyn with his Ibsenesque intermixture of realism and symbolism. It was the frankly poetic method of Mr. Yeats and the still more triumphant conquest of common life by the poetic imagination of Synge that made the Irish dramatic revival a restoration of the poet to his rightful place of supremacy in the theatre.

3. LADY GREGORY

A name which will always figure largely in the story of the Irish literary renaissance is that of Lady Gregory. In the first impulse the most effective forces were Mr. Yeats, Mr. Martyn and Mr. Moore; but as the direction of the movement changed, new stimulus was needed and it was Lady Gregory,

with Mr. Yeats, who supplied it. The ideal which guided the promoters of the Irish Literary Theatre was to develop culture in Ireland. They wished to see their country taking her due place in the world of art, and particularly in drama. They desired to create an appreciative Irish audience and to develop the faculty of play making and play acting in their fellow countrymen. The three prime movers of the renaissance drew inspiration and sustenance not only from their own Irish environment: they were deeply versed in and stimulated by the great body of European art. Mr. Yeats turned to Irish mythology and folklore, but he was also influenced profoundly by the French symbolists. And if he was directly inspired by the art of Villiers de l'Isle Adam and by the mysticism of M. Maeterlinck, he was influenced, at least indirectly through the medium of France, by the poetic and more highly imaginative side of the art of Ibsen. We have seen the same influence at work, even more directly, in the drama of Mr. Martyn; whilst Mr. Moore reflected for Ireland the common tendencies towards realism which were becoming manifest in contemporary English drama.

But the Irish dramatic revival became vital only when it became more narrowly national. Gradually a divergence of ideal set Mr. Yeats and Mr. Martyn moving in different directions. Mr. Martyn aimed at developing Irish culture on general, universal lines. He wished to see a theatre which would provide for Irishmen plays belonging to the common current of European art. Yet he was a rebel. His rebellion was against the tyranny of materialism and the so-called utility which, it seemed to him, were destroying the imaginative and spiritual vitality of Ireland. What he wanted for his country was not merely political liberty, but freedom to realize and to express those latent spiritual qualities which he felt to be in danger of extinction by the influence of an alien domination. He believed that the means for effecting this happy emancipation was the careful nurture of the spirit and of the imagination of Ireland by putting her *en rapport* with the best art of the world.

Mr. Yeats had precisely the same aim, but he seems to

have differed as to the best means for bringing about this renaissance of Irish culture. Although he himself was steeped in the art of many lands and many ages he felt that what Ireland needed was cultivation of a peculiarly national art. Probably he was right: certainly he was successful in that his view prevailed with happy results.

In pursuing this end Mr. Yeats had valuable help from Lady Gregory, whose name commands note first for the contribution to the work of establishing and consolidating the modern Irish Theatre in Dublin and also as a prolific dramatist. Lady Gregory's work sprang straight from the soil of Ireland and reinforced the movement on its national side. It was not that her work was politically nationalist, but it was imbued with and it contributed to native Irish culture.

Lady Gregory is primarily a writer of comedy. She has confessed that she exploited this vein for the very definite and useful reason that the Irish theatre needed comedy. "I had been forced," she says, "to write comedy because it was wanted for our theatre." [1] The especial need was for short pieces; so it was one-act comedies which she wrote. For this *genre* her talent was particularly suitable. She has a delightfully puckish fancy, which can conceive charming absurdity of character and incident. The perversity of misunderstanding which springs from a combination of freakish circumstance and the foibles of Irish character makes delightful farce in such plays as *Hyacinth Halvey* and *Spreading the News*. There is plenty of fun in *The Rising of the Moon*, which on the other hand differs from most of her work in touching the tender chord of patriotism.

Lady Gregory's chief gift is her faculty for dialogue. Vivid imagination and vast absurdity are its chief ingredients, and it moves with a speed and vivacity which keep mirth tuneful with a constant ripple of laughter. At the same time her range is not very wide. She makes endless use of pugnacity—especially the pugnacity of friends—to create farcical situation and to give opportunity for spirited

[1] *New Comedies*, p. 158.

vituperation. *The Workhouse Ward* consists of little else; but it is excellent fun. *The Bogie Men*, and even longer and more serious plays, such as *The Canavans* and *The Deliverer*, are made of similar elements.

The last two plays are types of an interesting dramatic experiment which Lady Gregory has made. Believing in the suitability of the Irish peasant speech, refined as it is in her hands and in the hands of others of her school, as a medium for dramatic dialogue, she has applied it to historical drama. At the same time she has followed the Elizabethan method further in flavouring historical material with realistic comedy. Indeed one might almost say that a play such as *The Canavans* is realistic Irish comedy flavoured with history. She draws a picture of domestic life in an Irish town in Elizabethan times and through the person of Captain Headley she gives us a distant glimpse of the English commander, Essex, and even of the Great Eliza herself, though neither is permitted to enter the stage. In *The White Cockade* the method is pursued more boldly, and, basing the plot on the cowardly retreat of James II. after the Battle of the Boyne, she introduces the poltroon King himself, Sarsfield and members of the rival armies. In another of these Folk-History Plays, as she aptly names them, she carries us back to the Egyptian servitude of the Israelites and shows us Moses—the King's Nurseling, as he is called—preparing the way for his people's deliverance. This is the most daring application of the method. The theme is biblical and we see Moses inciting his countrymen and slaying his Egyptian, who is represented as a tyrannical steward maltreating the Israelite slaves. Yet the play is essentially Irish. The slaves—Malachi, Ard and Dan—are wholly Irish in speech and humour. They indulge in the inevitable quarrelling and finally turn with fine dramatic irony on the Deliverer. Irishmen have been known to do this on other occasions.

This may seem a surprising dramatic method, but after all it is Shakespeare's.[1] It is merely an abandonment of historical and local colour which, although they have become

[1] It may be compared with Mr. Shaw's treatment of *Cæsar and Cleopatra*.

the fetish of modern times, never troubled the heads of dramatists a hundred years ago. It is no less justifiable for a modern Irish dramatist to set incidents of past Irish or Jewish history in a modern Irish scene and convey it through modern Irish character, than for a Sir Thomas Malory or a Lord Tennyson to depict an old British chieftain as a medieval knight or invest him with the characteristic virtues of a Victorian gentleman. Lady Gregory realizes her powers and knows that her art demands scope for her intimate knowledge of the manners and the character of the Irish peasant, and for her ability to write imaginative and racy dialogue with its wealth of Irish vocabulary and idiom. By this new, yet old, method she gains the opportunity she needs. If these plays cannot be assigned a high position as drama, one must admit that they abound in mirth-compelling absurdity and at least they show the great possibilities even in these days of this method of treating historical drama.[1]

Although Lady Gregory definitely set herself the task of writing comedies, she has not neglected tragedy altogether. There is deep poignancy in the short *Gaol Gate*, but it is little more than a lyrical narrative in the form of a tableau. The piece is saved by its shortness and concentration. If the method were extended to a three-act play it is hard to believe that the dramatic interest would be sustained. Lady Gregory has written full-length tragedies and their weakness is their lack of dramatic interest. We have seen that in comedy she is able to overcome tedium by her wealth of dialogue. It may be possible to keep laughter perpetually afloat on a rippling sea of humorous chat and comic squabbling, but of its own nature tragedy is not amenable to such treatment. The consequence is that such plays as *Grania* and *Kincora* move somewhat tediously. Lady Gregory tells us with reference to *Grania* that when Mr. Yeats learned that she was making a play of three persons "he said incredulously, 'They must have a great deal to talk about.' And so they have, for the talk of lovers is inexhaustible,

[1] Lady Gregory has pursued the same idea in her translation into "Irish" of some of Molière's plays. Although the result may not be Molière, it is something of worth on its own account.

being of themselves and one another." [1] This may be an explanation, but it is not an excuse: and the fact remains that talk alone will not make a good play, though if it is beautiful enough or humorous enough it may carry a play through. Unfortunately the talk in these plays has neither of these qualities to a sufficient degree.

Whatever may be the critical strictures meted out to Lady Gregory's dramatic work, there can be no doubt of its intrinsic merit and of its topical value as swelling the Abbey repertory when it was in need of sustenance, and as maintaining the tradition which the pioneers had established and handing it on to younger men. It is safe to say that a very great deal of the theatrical and dramatic success of the modern Irish revival is directly due to her. That is no mean contribution to the cause of Irish culture and world drama.

[1] *Irish Folk-History Plays*, i, pp. 195 f.

CHAPTER XIII

SYNGE

1871-1909

In the first stage of his literary development John Millington Synge fell under the influence of the conventional tendencies of the 'nineties. Although he had travelled and seen life in many lands it was in art rather than in life that he first sought the well-spring of poetry. Mr. Yeats found him in Paris in 1897 and with happy insight saw that he was working on wrong lines, that his milieu was likely to force him irrevocably into the rut of unreal, derivative poetry which flourished so luxuriantly but so morbidly at the end of the nineteenth century. It was on his advice that Synge left Paris and its unhealthy literary atmosphere for the open spaces and fresh air of the Aran Islands. Returning to the land of his birth he found loveliness in reality ; he made the great discovery that even in the stern life of western Ireland, far removed from the seats of conventional art and culture, real beauty lived. The first fruits of his sojourn amongst the peasants of the western isles, with whom he lived in intimate and affectionate intercourse, were his prose sketches in *The Aran Islands*. Here we have the raw material which was afterwards to be fashioned by the dramatist into his six plays.

The first of these was a little comedy called *In the Shadow of the Glen*, which was greeted in 1903 with no little hostility. He had dared to lay hands on the morality of the Irish peasant woman whom nationalist Ireland preserved as

sacrosanct in a case of rose-tinted glass. Nora confides her stories of somewhat wayward love to a Tramp who visits her cottage in the glen, and the two sit conversing in the presence of the corpse of Nora's husband, Daniel Burke. After the departure of the Tramp she goes on to make love to young Michael Dara, but the idyll is cut short rudely when the corpse sits up and shocks the life out of them with a violent sneeze. The fact is that her husband had played a trick on her, and, having discovered what he suspected, he drives her forth angrily from his house. She goes off happily enough with the Tramp, and Daniel Burke and Mike Dara sit down to drink. Nora resembles her namesake of *A Doll's House*. She is oppressed by the shadow of the glen. She had wedded an old man who was fairly well to do, but life finds no outlet. She talks just like many of the heroines of modern drama, who derive their thirst for life and self-expression from Ibsen. When she finally goes away with the Tramp it is with the hope of life—that romantic, pathetic hope which only rude experience can dull.

In 1904 appeared *Riders to the Sea*, a short but marvellously poignant tragedy, perhaps the most perfect thing Synge ever produced. In *The Shadow of the Glen* he had succeeded in bringing into the theatre something of the mystery of the lonely Wicklow mountains; in this play he depicts the human tragedy against the dour background of a cold, grey, hungry sea eating up the lives of the folk. Maurya has bred a family of sturdy sons. Their father and their grandfather were drowned; the four elder sons were drowned; Michael has been drowned and his body has just been washed ashore and we watch the two sisters examining his clothes which have been returned. Now Bartley, the only one left, goes to the horse fair on the mainland. Next we see his dripping corpse carried in as the bereft widow is describing the way in which the others had been brought to her.

It is the tragedy springing from the conflict of a stern race with the vast power of this grim western ocean as it lashes with fury the rocky coast of those inhospitable isles. It is a titanic conflict, but we feel from the first the inevitable issue

of the struggle. And yet the human agonist will not flinch from the fray : Maurya has no power to dissuade her son from entering the lists of life. It is indeed a hard, cruel existence for the women on those sea-girt coasts. As she takes up the dead Michael's stick before starting out on a last attempt to dissuade Bartley from making the journey, she cries out on the cruelty of a life which reverses the order of nature and dooms parents to survive their children. With uncanny foreknowledge Maurya is sure that Bartley is going to his death, he her last son ; but the ways of the world call louder than the pleadings of his distraught mother. It is a tragic thing to see her pain and expressive agony as he departs. But darker and more terrible is the unalleviated, unexpressive gloom which settles down on the heart of this stricken mother when she knows of his death. She sinks into resignation : it is almost a relief to know that now the sea can do her no more harm. At last she is immune. Quietly the curtain falls on the calm, black tragedy of a mother stripped of all her men.

This short sketch may give the impression that the play is gloomy and depressing. It certainly has a solemnizing effect ; but its splendour of language, its heroism of human character, the grandeur of its natural setting, and the pervasive sense of power, all combine to raise the tragedy to such a pitch of glowing intensity that it radiates beauty. It may inspire terror, but it has the lustral power of all great tragedy. Like all great tragedy its effect is not to depress but to uplift the spirit and to enrich the soul.

The Tinker's Wedding, a two-act sketch rather than a play, showed Synge in a laughing mood. The play is based on a striving in villainy between the Priest and a party of Tinkers, in which the Priest wins. Its crude, wild rough-and-tumble recalls the medieval and early Tudor idea of farce. It is simple and very close to primitive folk comedy.

To the same class belongs *The Well of the Saints*, which was produced at the Abbey Theatre in 1905 ; but this play, whilst more hilarious and cheerful than *In the Shadow of the Glen*, is less sordid and violent than *The Tinker's Wedding*.

The play turns on a delightfully absurd idea. A blind beggar and his blind wife have lived in happy darkness, accepting the tale of those who inform them that each is a lovely creature. Their awful disillusion when a good saint restores their eyesight provides the comedy of the play. The torrent of poetical Billingsgate flows unchecked even by blows, and Synge makes the most of the opportunity to exploit the Irish gift of vituperative rhetoric.

Time passes and with it their sight deserts them once again. By chance the angry pair meet and their mutual dislike gradually subsides under the quenching waters of self-love. Mary's optimism and imagination come to her rescue and at length save her, as these undying qualities of the Irish have ever saved the race. Martin may abuse her ugliness with all the power of his tongue, but her heart rises irrepressibly. In her moment of vision she had seen herself mirrored in a clear pool. What a sorry sight it must have been, says Martin. But no: her imagination had pierced the veil of the future and she could look forward with satisfying hope to the day when crowned with the glory of white hairs she would shine as the wonder of "the seven counties of the east." Martin's imagination is likewise fired and he seeks a similar refuge of hope for himself. Despite the contemptuous mockery of Mary his faith is undaunted as he foresees the day when he will be transfigured by "a beautiful long, white, silken, streamy beard." In that respect at any rate he need fear no competition from Mary. Laughter breaks in and together they look forward to the good days yet to be.

Into this idyllic scene enters the Saint himself and there bursts on this happy pair the horrible threat that once again they may be robbed of blessed blindness. Terrified they seek for a way of escape, but in vain. Indeed a hard case, as Martin laments, that their very blindness prevents them from running away from the danger of being restored to sight. Mary, nearly in tears, has not a crumb of comfort for her helpmate, as the web of fate enmeshes them. At the last moment Martin saves himself by desperately dashing

from the hands of the Saint the can containing the potent holy water which was to work the miracle of restoring their sight.

The play is an excellent piece of comedy. Without the tinge of bitterness which colours *In the Shadow of the Glen* it is full of mirth-provoking and good-tempered banter at the expense of the characteristic weaknesses of the Irish. Beyond this the language at times has the beauty of poetry. When it seems as if the play may be sinking to the level of coarseness or sordidness the exquisite richness of rhythm and the grandeur of the imagery raise the dialogue to heights of splendour.

It was in 1907 that Synge reached the greatest height of comedy in *The Playboy of the Western World*. The canvas is much larger than in *The Well of the Saints* and it is filled with a greater variety of human characters. In the earlier play the old blind couple dominate the stage, but here there are a number of characters each important and vital in a particular way. The humour is on a grand scale. The laughter which Synge evokes is not the intellectual smile of pure comedy nor the gross hilarity of mere rollicking farce. It is of that expansive kind which sprang from the fountain head so copiously in the character of Falstaff. The humour, like that of Falstaff, is notable for its enormity, for its huge absurdity.

Once again in this play Synge girds at the idiosyncrasies of his countrymen, in particular the queer contradictoriness of the Irish character in which mingle strong currents of wild romance and plain common-sense. Christy Mahon is a parricide, and admired of all for his notable feat. The fact is that he is a wretched fellow ; but, sunned in the glow of admiration, he finds unsuspected depths in himself. His own dormant imagination awakens under the influence of the imagination of those amidst whom he comes. His old life has been cramping like that of Nora in the narrow glen. His new environment gives him for the first time an opportunity to be his real self. As he discovers the effect of his story it expands with constant retelling. He is caught in

the rising spiral of his own imagination and his murderous feat grows like Falstaff's men in buckram. The fact is that he has run away from his deed in terror, and now he arrives at the shebeen, or small public-house, of Michael James Flaherty, commonly called Michael James. Pegeen, the sharp-tongued, high-spirited daughter of Michael, dazzled by his tale of prowess, throws over the poor-spirited Shawn, whom she was about to marry, for the new hero. She can no longer contemplate marrying a man " with no savagery or fine words in him at all."

Unfortunately the " murdered " father arrives, knocks him down and pricks the bubble reputation which his son had won by the fine words of his concocted story. Disappointed and angry at the collapse of her idealized hero, Pegeen repudiates him. This rouses the desperate Christy who rushes out and makes a murderous attack on his father which, according to those who come in, is this time only too real, for the old man is reported to be dead. Now, surely, thinks Christy, he has done what will win Pegeen; but the crime before the eyes of these people is very different from the great deed of an embellished tale. So she entrusts him to the men for delivery into the hands of justice. The crowning absurdity is the entry of the twice " murdered " father. At the horrific sight of a dead man walking all take fright and Christy is left bound but untended. Ironically enough it falls to old Mahon to unbind his son, and together they go out shaking off the dust of this place where all combine to abuse them. But now it is the son who is master, for his adventure has at least enabled him to discover his own self. When they go it is as if a light had been extinguished. Shawn triumphantly looks forward to winning Pegeen for himself again, now that her idol has crumbled to common dust. But hitting him a box on the ear she dismisses him for ever and breaks out in the anguish of grief for the loss of the only Playboy of the Western World.

The anger produced by the play is notorious. The play quite unnecessarily and ridiculously became a test of nationalist patriotism. It was urged that it was a calumny

on Irish character. This raises the vital question of the purport of the play. In one sense it was undoubtedly designed as a picture of Irish manners. Synge knew the Irish peasant whom he had studied with extreme care, and he saw that in addition to the spirituality and almost mystical sense of beauty on which the writers of the literary revival loved to dwell, there was in the people an element of almost brutal savagery. One can understand how Synge with his rather grimly sardonic humour would delight in throwing the blatant light of truth on the reality which was in danger of being falsely coloured by the tinted glass of sentimentalism. In that sense was there ever a joke which came off so well? So well indeed that the perpetrator was shocked and even angered by the serious protests with which it was greeted. There is no doubt that in the excitement of the affair Irishmen, usually so quick to perceive the ridiculous, for once at any rate lost their sense of humour.

Extravagant the play certainly is, but all comedy partakes of extravagance. It is never unkindly, and to an unbiased observer it does not seem essentially unjust. The real defence is that comedy exists on its own plane, as Lamb pointed out, and the characters of comedy obey not the moral law of everyday life but of the world in which they move and have their being. *The Playboy* is no more an insult to the Irish people, than Falstaff is an impeachment of the veracity of Englishmen. However, it is perhaps ungraceful for an Englishman to rebuke the Irish for being sensitive in such a case. One must remember that political conditions, for which the English have been responsible, were the prime cause of a somewhat supersensitive fear that the Sassenach would regard the play as an indictment of Ireland by one of her own sons, and one moreover who would be cited as an authority in his knowledge of his compatriots. It was unforgivable blasphemy for an Irishman to suggest even in joke that a murderer would *ipso facto* be welcomed as a hero and loaded with gifts, or that an Irish girl would ever speak in male company of that article of female wear called a shift. Still less could it be admitted that she would ever permit

a young man to pass the night in the house with her alone. Synge ventured to mock at what was to all nationalist Ireland no fit subject for laughter. It was a kind of profanity to jest about so sacred a subject as the moral virtue of Irish men and women. A free Ireland will probably feel differently.

One must also bear in mind that the hard line in Synge's own character, which touched his humour with grimness, showed itself in what may be called his paganism. The sense of overmastering fate, which we have remarked in *Riders to the Sea* and which will be seen no less in his last play, *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, is akin to the pagan attitude of mind which dominates Greek tragedy. There is something of the same quality underlying the brutality and animalism which in *The Playboy* are so prominent in the men and women who congregate in that little shebeen. Synge was a man of deep sympathy, but he had a piercing vision which sentimentalism could never blind. He saw the danger of the mystical element in much of the work of his contemporaries and it is as if he had determined that he would show that, as well as being spiritual, man was also in some respects a crude beast. In doing so Synge served the cause of truth. Yet at the same time he preserves a sense of decent proportion and never blackens human nature with that love of dirt which has sullied the work of some who have cited truth as an excuse for voiding their own filth.

Another phase of Irish character which Synge mocked in this play was the credulity and the love of romance which are apt in the Irish to develop into an absurd flattering imagination. This tendency is a queer, contorted form of egomania. We all know the man who from desire of self-aggrandizement (scarcely conscious maybe) magnifies all the persons and things that enter his experience. In another sense it is really a form of kind-heartedness and a desire to please which lead Irish people to let loose their imagination on a wild hunt for anything that may seem to be complimentary and gratifying. Whichever be the cause, the phenomenon is common in the Irish character, and Synge

has used it with triumphant comic effect. When Christy tells his ' gallous story ' to Pegeen she keeps pace and even outstrips him on the wings of her imagination. As she listens in rapture to his wonderful words he becomes transfigured by her fancy. His small feet, his very name, are such, she thinks, as belong only to kings and potentates. Disillusion is not necessarily a serious disappointment to such buoyant souls. If one grotesque palace of fancy is shattered another arises immediately from its wreck, as we saw in the imperturbable optimism of Martin and Mary Doul in *The Well of the Saints*. It must be a very thorough ruin that finally smashes the illusion. Such a catastrophe, alas, overtook poor Pegeen.

Imagination is a theme running right through the play. From one point of view Synge seems to be showing the glory of imagination, as the power to illumine the dark reality of life. Even such a poor creature as Christy or a girl sunk into so low an environment as Pegeen are transfigured by the power of imagination. Their feet are in the dirt and ugliness of this sordid pot-house, but their heads are in the golden clouds. The very quality which makes them absurd makes them magnificent. In this respect they share with the poets the faculty of creating beauty. Synge would be the last man to underestimate the value of this power. It was the basis of his own and of all real poetic art. But on the other hand he believed that reality was no less essential to poetry. Christy and Pegeen—indeed all these imaginative peasants—have the imagination, but not the reality. That was the characteristic Irish weakness which Synge desired to mock. Yet it is no less true, as Mr. Shaw and others have often said, that the Irishman can be an extremely rational, logical person. At the end of the play all the participators in this pleasant fiction are brought suddenly face to face with reality. Immediately reason triumphs and their plain common-sense shatters the fairy castles of imagination in which they have been luxuriating so pleasantly.

The Playboy is certainly a great work of art, and like all great art its meaning is not simple. But though its substance

is complex it is not obscure. Your great artist is a many-sided being and if he expresses himself fully his work will be many-sided. And in *The Playboy* Synge has embodied much of himself and of his outlook on life. It is the work of a man who faced life squarely and honestly, who realized that it was made of a variety of hues, but who found in it food for laughter. The play certainly has a harsh, even a bitter note, but it must rank with the great comedies of our literature. And like all good comedy it is healthy; for honest laughter, like honest tears, is good for the human heart.

At the time of his death, in 1909, Synge was at work on a tragedy based on the old tale of Deirdre. It is not possible to say how far he might have altered the play had he lived to complete the task; but there is little doubt that *Deirdre of the Sorrows* as we have it is not all that Synge intended or just what it could have been if he had had the opportunity of further revision. Nevertheless, even as it stands, it is on a grander scale than anything else he wrote. The story is well known: how Conchubor, High King of Ulster, loved the mysterious maiden Deirdre. He would have married her, but a fatal love sprang up between her and Naisi, a son of Usna, and the young lovers fled to Scotland. There in Alban they live seven golden years. Then comes a fair-sounding message of peace from Conchubor and they return to Ireland. But the invitation was fraught with treachery and the toils close round the lovers until death alone can free them. Synge takes this simple tale and fashions a story of great woe. Finding a beautiful vase of hazy legend, he fills it with the rich wine of vital human reality.

Although the action is spread over a term of seven years and takes place in two different countries, the construction is nevertheless compact. In Act I. we see Deirdre restless under the vigilance of Lavarcham, the old duenna to whom Conchubor has entrusted the upbringing of this girl. When she is old enough Conchubor intends to make Deirdre his queen and he now comes to bid her be ready for marriage in two days or three. But it is too late. Her fate has ruled

otherwise. She has seen Naisi, the son of Usna, with his brothers hunting on the hills: him alone does she love. From the first it is certain that they must love: equally certain that their love will be crowned with woe. From the very outset of the play the doom impends: nothing disguises or impedes its inevitable descent on the devoted lovers. Even Deirdre knows well the sorrow she is laying in store, but she pursues her path without swerving. Lavarcham, who knows Deirdre, avers that not even the dread of death would deter this girl. When Conchubor comes to summon her to marriage, Deirdre quietly, but with immutable resolution, refuses. What is it to be a queen in Emain when her only pleasure is to be free on the hills? So far she does not realize her love for Naisi, and she interprets her distaste for Conchubor only in terms of a maiden anxiety to remain free. It is only when Naisi and his brethren find their way to the house of Lavarcham that she sees clearly. In a breath womanhood flowers within her: she looks steadily on life and knows that she and Naisi are one. She knows well the dreadful prophecy that has joined their names in a common doom, but she never flinches from what is to her and Naisi an unalterable destiny.

Act II. passes in Alban, that Scottish land where the lovers have spent seven years of blissful exile. Envoys arrive with great news, that Conchubor offers them a safe return to their native land. Deirdre perceives that the hand of Fate is slowly rising to deliver her inevitable blow. In vain Fergus, the envoy, pleads with Naisi, who however at length confesses that there is a canker in the flower of his happiness: doubt has entered into his love. His love was really as strong as ever, but sometimes he had wondered whether a day might not come when he would tire of Deirdre and Deirdre would perceive that he had wearied of her. Accidentally she overhears this confession and she takes her decision. She will no longer dissuade him from going back to Emain, to what she believes to be certain destruction. She has had her day: she would rather descend quickly into the gulf than linger through barren years. Love and life have been

richly beautiful. For seven radiant years earth has been their bed. With joy they have lain down amidst the scent of the grasses and with joy they have awakened to the music of the birds. But life is finite and even love has its term. Better sudden death than the slow dissolution of life and love. So she persuades Naisi and they set out for Ireland.

Act III. closes the tragedy. Fergus, the envoy, had acted in good faith towards the exiles, but he himself had been tricked by the treacherous King. Naisi and Deirdre are separated from their companions and brought to a tent where Conchubor meets them. Behind a curtain is a grave prepared: Deirdre and Naisi have looked into it and they realize its purport. But all is quiet, not with the calm of peace but with the menacing hush of the impending storm. Suddenly the storm bursts. Naisi's brothers are being foully attacked outside in the woods. At their cry for help he must go to their aid, but Deirdre would hold him back. At length he breaks from her. For the first time, and the last, they exchange harsh words. He goes out to his death. At last Conchubor sees his object within his grasp ; now he will take to his great house in Emain the queen for whom he has waited and plotted and prepared. A messenger rushes in with the news that his house is in flames : Fergus, enraged at discovering the treachery in which his own honour had been implicated, has visited it with fire and sword. Deirdre, broken with grief, turns a deaf ear to the pleadings of Conchubor, till his impatience rises. Then she is stung into life, and this tragic queen, Deirdre of the Sorrows, is transfused with the glory of love and woe. Radiant in her beauty and her youth, she looks disdainfully on the wretched amorous old king. She towers above him, above the transitory littleness of fleeting life. With her lips still stained with the ruby wine of love she passes for ever from the world of dwindling love and perishing youth to the eternal life where there is no decay. Pressing the knife of Naisi into her heart she is immortalized as the Queen of Love. With her dying breath she rues the pitiful thing that Conchubor

has done, yet it is " a thing will be a joy and triumph to the ends of life and time."

The play moves with unhasting swiftness. From the beginning the end is clear; and with a speed scarcely perceptible for its steadiness the action unrolls with unerring simplicity. Tragedy broods over the beautiful story from the very start. The actors of the tragedy themselves see whither they are tending, but an inexorable doom overawes and constrains them. There is an element of conflict in the drama; but in a sense the struggle is so unequal that it is hardly appreciable. In this respect the play reminds one not so much of English drama as of a Greek tragedy in which vast fate slowly closes in on the human puppets; and men and women, great in themselves, are dwarfed by the immensity of circumstance.

What seems to be a flaw in the play is the final parting of Deirdre and Naisi before he goes out to meet his death. It is not clear why Synge made them part with cruel words. Was it that he wanted to increase the bitterness of Deirdre's sorrow after Naisi's death? Or was it that he desired to suggest that the time had come when harshness was creeping into their love and that death came in time to immortalize their love at its zenith? He has not made himself clear and in effect he has only diminished the grandeur. It must, however, be remembered that had Synge lived he would probably have revised the play and a further revision might have removed this particular ambiguity. In this connection one may mention the unpleasant and unnecessary character of Owen who similarly gives a bitter flavour and seems to serve no useful dramatic purpose. It may be that the real explanation is to be found in that grim line which we have noticed in the texture of all Synge's work. He may have felt that without some drops of bitterness he could not mix the real cup which life presents to the lips of men and women.

Of this play, as of *Riders to the Sea*, it must be stated emphatically that however inexorable and inevitable the tragedy, however deep the gloom, however pagan the

fatalism, the play is neither depressing nor pessimistic. Like all great tragedy it ennobles. The terror and pity stir our emotions to purify them. Human nature is shown at its topmost height of glory, love triumphing over death itself.

Moreover, as in all Synge's plays, the exquisite language is in itself an unceasing source of beauty, a constant stimulus to fine emotion. Synge's language is unique : he discovered a new vehicle for drama. The great tragedies of the past have been expressed in a medium of verse, for dramatists have realized the value, indeed the necessity, of some form of language elevated above the commonplace speech of every day and the intrinsic virtue of rhythm in a play pitched on a high note of passion. Some modern dramatists, as we have seen, have attempted to write realistic tragedy on modern themes in modern everyday language. They have shown that it can be done ; but it is a notable fact that none have succeeded in attaining the heights of emotional elevation which have been reached by writers who have adopted an artificial language.

There is no question that Synge's language is artificial. It was never spoken by mortal man : it is no less a literary diction than the much abused poetic diction of the eighteenth century. The difference between these two kinds of diction is that in the eighteenth century poetic diction was not merely unrealistic, it was unreal : it was based not on speech so much as on a literary tradition. Synge's diction, on the other hand, was unrealistic, but it was founded on reality. It is a literary form based on the English patois of the Irish peasant and influenced largely, it is said, by Gaelic idiom. In the English spoken in Ireland Synge tells us that he found a language which was still rich and living. By using a diction which is a selection of real language a writer may achieve beauty of language and yet retain the reality which is an essential quality of poetry. He goes on to say that such diction is attainable only by a writer who moves amongst people who have not banished poetry from their speech. That quality he found in Ireland. For a little while longer the Irish, he hoped, would retain " a popular

imagination that is fiery and magnificent, and tender." [1] For the writers of Ireland it was therefore still possible to draw inspiration that was not available for those who lived and worked amongst more sophisticated people.

Beauty of language is one means by which Synge's plays are raised far above the sordid ugliness which is apt to smirch modern realistic drama. Nobility of thought and height of emotion also serve to raise them to the plane of high art. It is true to say that Synge has done in practice what he demanded in theory : he has based his drama on reality and inspired it with joy. The full-blooded joy of his comedies is obvious, despite a tendency to occasional irony and even to bitterness. They are not without a touch of brutality ; but it is the crudity of healthy animalism and not a degrading meanness. Synge condemns " the false joy of the musical comedy " provocative of a prurient smirk ; and in its place he demanded and himself gave " the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality," which impels to healthy laughter.

His tragedies are irradiated by the magnificence and beauty of their natural setting. It is a fearsome but beautiful monster that devours the strong men of the western isles, where wind and surf combine to terrify and to soothe. What is more peaceful and lovely than the woods of Alban where Deirdre and Naisi lived and loved for seven years, " waking with the smell of June in the tops of the grasses, and listening to the birds in the branches that are highest " ?

Riders to the Sea and *Deirdre* are instinct with what one may call the tragic analogue of joy, a sense of triumphant glory in human nobility. The beautiful souls of Maurya and Deirdre seem to be swept to perdition by the whirl of destructive circumstance. Not so : they rise above their conditions and show that there is a love great enough to rob the grave of its victory and to deprive death of its sting, that the heart purged by grief may attain a peace which passeth all understanding.

Synge's dramatic work was alas ! small in bulk, but for

[1] Preface to *The Playboy of the Western World.*

that little we would give almost the whole work of his contemporaries. His plays are not all on one level, but none is despicable. He stands out from the drama of his age in his complete immunity from the thraldom of didacticism. He believed in Shakespeare's method. He looked upon life and saw much that was stuff for laughter, much that moved to tears ; but it was all interesting. From the raw material of experience, he fashioned by the creative power of his potent imagination the images of man and nature which are his art. At the age of thirty-eight years he died, having written six plays. His powers were still growing from strength to strength and we can but guess what the world has lost through that early death. Beginning with *The Shadow of the Glen*, a powerful but rather sardonic little comedy, he had risen *per saltum* to the heights of tragedy in the concentrated force of *Riders to the Sea*. Returning to a comic vein he gave that hilarious sequence of *The Tinker's Wedding*, his weakest play, then the delightful *Well of the Saints*, followed by the exuberant *Playboy*. Before the end he returned to tragedy and closed his life-work with *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, indubitably his grandest achievement. To what heights might he not have risen if the fatal shears had not so prematurely slit the thin-spun life ? That none can say. What we can say is that, even in the work that we have, there is sufficient quantity and all the quality to warrant us in assigning to him a place second only to Shakespeare among the dramatists who have written in the English tongue. Of high imagination, greatly comprehending and deeply sympathizing with human life, he laughed and wept with man's joy and sorrow. Inspired with a love of beauty he had the skill to express his vision of life in a form beautiful in detail and balanced in design. Above all, believing in the greatness of mankind, though fully conscious of its littleness, he created works of art which not only were clever and meritorious, but were in the real sense great.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DRAMA OF REVOLT

It is a truism to say that every epoch is an age of transition. It is also true that at certain periods the transition is more rapid than at others. The Victorian age, so far as it can be isolated, was a time when settled opinion clung strongly to the value of work and duty as the props of religion and of economic welfare. A potently solvent agency was the drama of Ibsen, whose philosophic influence reached the English stage chiefly through Mr. Shaw and his disciples Hankin and Mr. Barker. They put to the test the firmly established conventions and morality of the large middle class of England which had attained to such great heights of economic and social power by the end of the nineteenth century. Robertson, Sir Arthur Pinero and Oscar Wilde, amongst many others, had directed their keenly tipped satire against the aristocracy. Next it was the turn of the English bourgeoisie to undergo painful scrutiny. The setting of Victorian plays was the country house or a drawing-room of Mayfair : the new drama had its milieu in the tradesman's parlour or the unlovely but sumptuous dining-room of the rich manufacturer. The older drama had an atmosphere of anglican respectability : the drama of the younger school breathed close dissent.

Although the Victorian ideal was rooted in the doctrine of submission to work and duty, countervailing tendencies were taking shape. Ibsen has been mentioned. Another very important influence was that of Whitman. In one sense the nineteenth century was the era of individualism. This is

true of the economic field ; but in social and moral matters it was an age of rigid convention. Educational practice, which is always a fair indication of the spirit of an age, was at bottom repressive. Whether he admitted it or not man was really afraid of human nature. The old theological doctrine of original sin reflected the pessimistic view that man was essentially bad and could attain virtue only when a large measure of inborn evil had been exorcized by a long process of moral discipline. This was blasphemy to Walt Whitman, who, following the tradition of the French Revolutionary philosophers, believed in the essential goodness and purity of nature, and strove to emancipate mankind from the many taboos which prevented it from developing along healthy natural lines.

Ibsen and Whitman were only two of many philosophers and artists who were moving in this direction. But they stand out in the latter middle part of the nineteenth century as apostles of the modern doctrine of self-expression, a doctrine which dominates the spirit of the twentieth century. Their influence can be seen in many ways. Ibsen not only made a deep mark on English drama : as a weapon of the feminist movement he impressed the social outlook even more widely. Aristocrat though he was, the socialists also seized on him, finding in his teaching much that coincided with their view of life. Whitman's influence also flowed in many channels. In Henley and Stevenson his energy and love of open air freedom are reflected ; his noisy democracy is re-echoed in the scarcely less reverberant tones of Mr. Edward Carpenter, and he also has been appropriated as a political prophet. In these and other ways the spirit of Whitman and Ibsen has permeated modern thought. Their influence has necessarily proved to be revolutionary ; and modern drama in so far as it is imbued with their ideas and with similar doctrines is a drama of revolt. It is a revolt against the repressive conventions of the past. These conventions in the hands of our fathers spelled material success and moral self-satisfaction—a result by no means despicable. What wonder that the generation which had

thriven on those ideals should wish to hand them on to a younger generation? With remarkable complacency they saw that their work was very good. An age which cherished not least the ideal of parental devotion felt the necessity of transmitting to its children, even by coercion, the good thing which it had learned and lived by. Unfortunately a stiff-necked generation of offspring failed to appreciate these inherited ideals, and with the eternal ingratitude of the young they subjected them to scathing criticism, often closing their eyes to what was of genuine worth and concentrating attention on what seemed to them bad.

One result of this attitude of mind was a particular kind of drama. In the first place, it tended to fill plays with didactic theory as we have seen in the case of several writers. Secondly, it led to what one may call a negative quality of art. Drama has rightly been called a criticism of life, but if it is to be great drama criticism must mean more than censure and life must mean more than manners. It must reflect life truly and deeply; it must depend on the creation of great human character. The censure of petty people and silly conventions may produce the laughter which supports comedy; but a more positive, a nobler view of life is necessary for the health of serious drama and tragedy. We shall unfortunately see but little of these qualities in the product of the spirit of revolt which inspired the dramatists now to be considered.

As was stated in the first chapter, the task of selecting the authors to be considered in this book has proved a difficult and perhaps invidious task; but in no place has it been more difficult than in this present chapter. During the five years immediately preceding the Great War there was a very large output of drama of the kind under review.[1] Much of it reached a creditable, and some of it a high, standard of merit; and it might well be considered here. But to undertake such a big task would be impracticable and we must confine our attention to typical instances.

[1] See Brighouse, Calderon, McEvoy, Monkhouse, Rowley in bibliographical appendix.

1. HOUGHTON

One of the most brilliant of this class was Stanley Houghton, like several of the young playwrights of that day the product of a provincial Repertory Theatre. It may safely be said that the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, gave him his chance. Dying in 1913 at the age of thirty-two, he had not written much, and we shall be concerned only with his two longer plays. Having tested his hand in one-act comedies he wrote *The Younger Generation*, a three-act drama which was produced in 1910. It is a domestic conflict fought out in the respectable home of the Kennion family who live comfortably, but unostentatiously, in a suburb of Salchester. The theme is simply the revolt of the younger generation against the rigid bourgeois puritanism which dominates this home. In writing this play Houghton was occupied primarily with his thesis, with the result that the dialogue is full of the dramatist's ideas, whilst the characters are wooden and unconvincing. In an external, superficial way this suburban family appears real, but it is rather the realism which depends on careful local colour than the reality which springs from the creation of vital human character.

Mr. Kennion is a stiff Liberal and nonconformist who takes himself very seriously and consequently treats his children with stern pomposity. The younger generation—Arthur, Grace and Reggie—all rebel. They have been cabined and confined in a stuffy moral atmosphere, and very properly they want liberty. Arthur is the family Spartacus and he raises the banner of revolt by deliberately getting drunk and kissing the maid. To these misdemeanours he adds the crime of refusing to attend chapel the next morning. The whole tendency of this type of play is crystallized in the notable father-and-son scene in the last act, where each puts his point of view which is quite irreconcilable with that of the other. It is the cry of youth for fresh air, for liberty to be natural; and on the other hand it is the no less earnest anxiety of the parent to do what he believes to be best for

his son. Arthur may be a puppy and Kennion a humbug; but the conflict is essentially true of many an English home.

Behind Arthur are his sister and his younger brother. Reggie sighs for "a man's life" in Canada, rather than to be cooped up in a city office. Even Maggie the maid is a rebel. Kennion insists on Arthur's apologizing to her in public for his improper embraces. The patriarch, turned judge and executioner too, demands a public example. This is too much for Maggie, who exclaims:

> I don't mind being kissed by any one, even by you, sir; but when it comes to being apologized to before everybody, just as if I'd done something wrong . . .
> I'd rather give you notice now, sir.

Mrs. Kennion occupies an ambiguous position, loyal to both sides, but in the nature of things of little help to either. The two stalwart reserves are on the one hand Kennion's mother who supports him in his most rigid discipline and on the other Thomas Kennion, his brother, who frankly sides with youth.

Thus the powers are arrayed and the first honours go to Arthur. Yet one's sympathies are enlisted for the father, who with all his strutting pomposity has real affection for his children. He sincerely believes them to be desperately wrong and he would save them if he could. The weakness of his strategical position consists in his hopes of election to the city council. The horror of public scandal is narrowly, indeed doubtfully, averted. Next follows the threat of domestic scandal, when Arthur asks him point blank in the presence of the assembled family whether he, the strict and self-satisfied Mr. Kennion, had never been drunk. Here the play exhibits its worst flaw. The situation is a hard one for Mr. Kennion and the dramatist; and both stumble. Thomas knows the true answer and so do we, but Mr. Kennion first shuffles and then tells a direct lie. The dramatist uses this lie to save Mr. Kennion's soul. He knows that his pedestal has been knocked from under him, and humanized by his fall he becomes a more reasonable father. The flaw is in imagining that he would have told a lie. He was not that

kind of man. He may have been a humbug in certain features of his character, but he was not utterly false. Surely that lie is not of a piece with the rest of his portrait as the dramatist depicts him.

The play deserves full consideration because it is so typical of a whole class, but dramatically it falls short of greatness. It is interesting and significant not only in the history of drama but as a social record, for it displays not unfairly the restricted outlook which governs even to-day the upbringing of too many young people. But one is bound to confess that it cannot be assigned a high position on its intrinsic artistic merits.

Houghton's next play, *Hindle Wakes* (1912), deserves much greater praise. Again the theme is the conflict between parent and child, and again the setting is in a well-to-do provincial bourgeois home. Added to it, perhaps not advantageously, is an aspect of the feminist question. The play opens in the cottage of Christopher Hawthorn and his wife. Their peace of mind is shattered by the discovery that their daughter, Fanny, has been spending a week-end at the seaside with young Alan Jeffcote. Alan is the son of a hard, but honest, cotton spinner, who has built up a big and lucrative business. Hawthorn was once a mate of Nat Jeffcote, but he has not got on and is an employé in his old friend's mill. When he hears of Alan's behaviour Jeffcote insists that he shall marry Fanny. Alan is not an abandoned roué : he is *l'homme moyen sensuel*, lacking in moral force and moral courage. His spree seems to him a venial peccadillo and he cannot appreciate the necessity of marrying Fanny. He much prefers Beatrice Farrar, the rich girl whom he is engaged to marry. As for Fanny—well, that was only a lark. He shows some fight when his father orders him, under pain of disinheritance, to wed Fanny. He cannot be deprived of inherited obstinacy ; and he resolves to marry Beatrice at all costs. Still Beatrice has to be considered. She is not angry ; but she is broken-hearted. Although she does not cease to love him, she realizes that it is impossible for her to marry him. He must marry the girl who has

a better right to him, to whom he has given the patent of love.

There is nothing better for him than to marry Fanny and recover his father's approval. When the Hawthorns come to discuss the affair the only thing left to decide is the time and manner of the wedding. After some little argument in which Fanny has taken no share, she informs them that she has not the slightest intention of marrying Alan. This is a shock for all, but an especial blow to Mrs. Hawthorn, who has all along seen the possibility of forcing a brilliant match for her daughter. But that is not Fanny's view of life. Her ideas are expressed with startling precision in a very delightful duologue with Alan. Alan is painfully surprised at her refusal; but Fanny helps to clear his mind of false preconceptions. The fact is, she says:

> You can't understand a girl not jumping at you when she gets the chance, can you?

Alan thinks that it is chivalrous self-sacrifice that is guiding her decision: that she does not want him to be disinherited for not marrying her and therefore takes the onus of refusal on herself. Again he has missed the point.

> *Fanny.* Don't you kid yourself, my lad! It isn't because I'm afraid of spoiling *your* life that I'm refusing you, but because I'm afraid of spoiling *mine*! That didn't occur to you?

The wretched Alan has become so twisted and confused that he seems to think that it is positively Fanny's duty to marry him. He is genuinely shocked when Fanny explains that he had merely been the means for her having a lark. In fact she regarded him just as he regarded her.

> *Alan.* But do you mean to say that you didn't care any more for me than a fellow cares for any girl he happens to pick up?
> *Fanny.* Yes. Are you shocked?
> *Alan.* It's a bit thick; it is really!
> *Fanny.* You're a beauty to talk!
> *Alan.* It sounds so jolly immoral. I never thought of a girl looking on a chap just like that! I made sure that you wanted to marry me if you got the chance.
> *Fanny.* No fear! You're not good enough for me. The chap Fanny Hawthorn weds has got to be made of different stuff from you, my lad . . .

This clear-sighted, unsentimental young woman is a baffling problem for the old morality. Her mother, deeply chagrined at the loss of a fine matrimonial opportunity, wraps her anger in a cloud of righteousness. But Fanny perceives the real cause of her wrath. With irrefutable logic she asks how marrying Alan would make her an honest woman, as her mother puts it.

> *Fanny.* You called him a blackguard this morning.
> *Mrs. Hawthorn.* So he is a blackguard.
> *Fanny.* I don't see how marrying a blackguard is going to turn me into an honest woman !
> *Mrs. Hawthorn.* If he marries you he won't be a blackguard any longer.
> *Fanny.* Then it looks as if I'm asked to wed him to turn him into an honest man ?

Houghton was not the first dramatist to attack the prevailing convention that a man was in honour bound to marry the woman whom he had ruined. Oscar Wilde as early as 1893 had shown in *A Woman of No Importance* that marriage in such circumstances might intensify the wrong. Hankin in *The Last of the Mullins* had embodied in Janet a protest against the convention. Nevertheless by reason of the dramatic prominence which he gave to the problem in his play and the manner in which it was handled, Houghton may rightly be regarded as original in his treatment of the question.

The play ends with a blank negative, and we sympathize with Jeffcote, who despatches Alan with a " Get along ! I'm disgusted with thee ! " In this conflict of father and son the honours go to the rough old Jeffcote. He may be hard even to callousness, but it is the hardness of a rough morality. If he was hard he was never puritanical like old Kennion. He has allowed his son plenty of rope, he has given him all the money he wanted. The struggle between father and son is not in this play symbolical of the revolt of the younger generation against the repressive conventions of the older. It is the conflict between an old man of crude integrity and a weak, selfish, expensive cur of a son. If anywhere it is in Fanny that the spirit of young vitality in

revolt against outworn ideals is embodied. She has a way of life of her own. Life may surge somewhat too violently and feverishly in her hot blood ; but if she is at times swept away by unbridled passion, she is not lacking in strength of intellect. Her week-end at Llandudno bears a certain analogy to the symbolical drunkenness of Arthur Kennion. Arthur went on the spree to show his father that he was not afraid to kick over the traces : Fanny went on the spree to show herself that she dared.

Hindle Wakes is a better constructed play than *The Younger Generation,* and it is not overloaded with the theoretic talk that burdens the earlier work. The play impresses one as being very real, not merely with the realism of local colour, though the setting is depicted with simple verisimilitude : it is in the characters themselves that the reality lies. We feel that we are watching the development of a true human crisis rather than the dancing of stage puppets regulated by scarcely hidden strings. In this play Houghton moved with a sureness and ease which he did not attain in any other play. He always deals with characters and settings with which he is familiar, but in *Hindle Wakes* alone does he master and control his material. The fatal blemish in the play, and unfortunately a radical weakness, is that the whole plot turns on what is after all the nastiness of a nasty person. Our interest is captured and held, but it is chiefly the emotion of disgust which is excited. No great drama can be built with such sordid material. Nat Jeffcote might have been made a great character, with all his faults : it may even be said that he is great. But even if he is, the dramatist does not vitalize him to ennoble the play. The nearest to greatness is the almost tragic Beatrice ; but she is not exploited to any great dramatic end. Houghton wrote enough to show that he had interesting ideas on life, and that he had great dramatic skill. He also showed that he could conceive great character. If he had lived he might have combined all these qualities and given us the great drama which he just missed in *Hindle Wakes.*

2. ELIZABETH BAKER

Miss Baker has done for the suburbs of London what Houghton did for a northern provincial city. Her most striking play is *Chains* (1909), which in its very title is typical of the drama of revolt. With extreme accuracy of detail she has here depicted the mean, petty round of suburban life. Houses are built in ugly rows and life moves with drab uniformity. Charley Wilson is a clerk, just like the tens of thousands of other clerks who pour out of the great termini every morning and are swallowed up by them with equal regularity every evening. Week after week, month after month, year after year, the Charley Wilsons tread their little mills to keep in motion the great machine of metropolitan industry. At home he finds little to raise him to higher levels. Even a few yards of land in which to toil would be a means of expressing his vitality, but only a despicable little back patch is available. Lily, his wife, has been reared in similar surroundings; but unlike her husband she feels no chafing of the chains. Her being is reduced to the condition of her life. Intent on the hard struggle of material life her soul has been stunted. She fails utterly to sympathize with Charley's craving for a freer existence, for conditions in which his personality, his soul, may put forth something of the energy which lies latent beneath his chains.

Young Tennant, their lodger, is about to cast his chains from him. He will no longer suffer the cramp and confinement of city life and he is off to Australia in the morning. This heroic example fires Charley's ambition. The petty round of a suburban week-end, with its silly little Saturday amusements which can rise only to the level of social intercourse with such a large, genial fool as their neighbour Leslie, and its dull Sunday anæsthesia in the respectable home of Lily's parents, the Masseys, chokes him as he gasps for the fresh air of life. If there is a rebel in his own home whom he can admire, there is an ardent spirit in the Massey household who spurs him further towards revolt. Lily's

sister, Maggie, is engaged to wed a well-to-do business man. It is not love, however, that impels her, but a desire for freedom from the tyranny of life in a shop. The turmoil in the Massey family which is caused by the barest suggestion that Charley hankers after the free life which Tennant is seeking makes Maggie take stock of her position She realizes that she is marrying the dull, fond widower, Foster, only as a means of breaking her chains, and she perceives that she is thereby forging new and stronger shackles. So she breaks her engagement. At the same time Charley decides to brave the flood of public condemnation and to join Tennant in his Australian venture. His spirit is surging with adventurous longing and it is secretly arranged that Maggie will care for his wife till he can make her a home in a new land. All the plans are laid when Lily shyly and happily brings him the great news that he may expect to be a father. Just as he was about to burst his chains, another unbreakable bond is affixed. He sees that he is finally fettered and he submits dully to a continuance of the old, weary, soul-cramping existence from which, for one instant, he had hoped to escape.

Thus the play ends on a bitter note which is sharpened by the unheeding cheerfulness of poor little Lily who is so easily content with her petty course of life. The play is another story of revolt. None of the characters is great or winning, and the misfortune never attains a tragic level. It is a pitiful tale of jarring circumstance. To the majority the trivial life they lead gives ample scope for their highest aspirations. Charley and Maggie are of different mettle and their spirits cannot breathe this exhausted atmosphere. Tennant's *beau geste* stirs their imagination and arouses a spirit of discontent which catches them in its compelling grip. It is an old story retold with all the cruel irony of meticulous veracity. Miss Baker spares us nothing of the meanness of the drab environment of these people, typical of the mass of middle-class workers. It is pitiful to see these wild birds beating their wings in vain against the bars ; but the real pity of it is that the great majority are so unconscious

of the glory of the free air that they feel no imprisonment in their cages. The play depicts the terrible anæmia of soul which has resulted from the social development of the last century. The vast industrial machine built up in the nineteenth century is served by millions of men, women and children whose vitality has been sapped by the conditions of their lives, and whose weak hearts feebly pump their impoverished blood through pale and flaccid limbs. Such is one consequence of the civilization of which we are apt to boast. The dramatist directs our view to this other, more sordid side of modern life, and forces us to realize that the blind acquisition of material wealth has in fact been accompanied by spiritual imprisonment.

Of course there is the dirty work that must be done: drudgery is a necessary part of human effort to progress. And no one who has not submitted to the discipline of work is saved. The nineteenth century saw the culmination of a tendency which glorified work and duty, and in an important respect it was profoundly right. Yet in another sense this apotheosis of work was dangerous. Work is a necessary and valuable servant, but it may become a dangerous master. Puritanism and commercialism have combined in England to exalt the idea of work and duty to a very high position. The rising capitalist of the seventeenth century devoted his whole being to work and he wanted men prepared to work for him assiduously. His need coincided with the prevalent doctrine of the puritan divine, that to labour in one's vocation, putting aside the vain pleasures of the world, was to march direct to heaven. The ethical basis of work was primarily individualistic. By labouring in his vocation man was saving his soul; and by implication the sluggard ran eternal risks. Modern thought is concentrated on the communal value of work. The drone may be damaging himself, but it is no less serious that he is shirking his responsibility towards society if he neglects to contribute his share of labour to the maintenance and advancement of his kind. As the ethics of work have changed there has been a critical appraisement of its intrinsic worth, with the

result that more stress is laid on the part of life which lies outside actual work. Modern thought assigns greater importance to the æsthetic and recreative side of life and sees less value in the mere unpleasantness of a man's duty. The Victorian ethic had tended to gloat almost ascetically over what was hardest and least pleasurable in life, hugging its hair shirt of duty. Mrs. Massey represents this point of view, which certainly embodies a valuable quality of cheerful stoicism.

> *Maggie* . . . Office work is awf'lly monotonous.
> *Mrs. Massey.* Of course it is. So is all work. Do you expect work to be pleasant ? Does anybody ever like work ? The idea is absurd. Anyone would think work was to be pleasant. You don't come into the world to have pleasure. We've got to do our duty, and the more cheerfully we can do it, the better for ourselves and everybody else.

The twentieth century does not deny the essential necessity which Mrs. Massey posits, but it demands that the necessary work shall be pleasant so far as is possible and that the inevitably unpleasant work shall be reduced to the lowest possible minimum. Furthermore, it desires to give the amplest opportunity for self-expression through the activities which are beyond the scope of the working life.

In practice circumstances are harsh. Most of us are caught unawares into the great mill and set to work without reference to our particular ability or temperament. This play illustrates the deadly consequences that may thus accrue to sensitive, adventurous souls. The majority, content with their lot, play for safety, and unable to sympathize with bolder spirits think them fools if they struggle to escape from the cage and change secure captivity for dangerous freedom. Futhermore, so strong is the hold of the puritan doctrine of work that they regard these wild creatures as positively wicked. Miss Baker fully recognizes the danger of the ardent motives which inspire the Maggies and the Charleys, but she admires their pluck and at least would have us understand their point of view and realize the social danger of crushing them too rigorously.

In *The Price of Thomas Scott,* produced in 1913 at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, Miss Baker developed the theme of the puritan attitude to duty and embodied once again the clash of old and new ideals. Thomas Scott is a hard-bitten, even rabidly prejudiced puritan of the old school. He hugs his hair shirt with a will and seems to rejoice that "the way of righteousness is hard." With the relentless logic of the honest fanatic he will follow his principles to the bitter end. Rufford and Tewkesbury, fellow members of his chapel, are able to compromise on the question of dancing. Dancing is admittedly immoral to Rufford, but then circumstances alter cases, and it is easier to relax. As he puts it :

> Hang it all, Scott, let the girl kick her heels a bit. May tells me she is wild to go—and Mrs. Rufford is going—and it's a Radical affair after all, Scott. It isn't like your shilling hops at a public hall.

Thomas Scott is not the man to palter in such a subtle fashion with what he believes to be the truth and he withholds his consent when his daughter Annie longs to go to the dance.

Scott's business is decaying in a steadily deteriorating neighbourhood, but the long-sought chance comes with an offer to buy his shop for the sake of the site which is wanted by a Dancing Hall Company. He is tempted and he consents to compromise his principles. It is a hard struggle, but the thought of his beloved wife and of the future of his boy finally overcomes him. Then he realizes that he has sold his soul. He can no longer refuse permission to Annie to dance ; he cannot bring himself to sign a petition against the renewal of a dancing licence to a neighbouring Concert Room. But though he is worsted in the first skirmish he finally conquers and flings back the money : he prefers to face privation and final ruin to accepting what he believes to be the price of sin.

He is a hard, obstinate man. Wicksteed and the world write him down fool. Wicksteed cannot comprehend it :

> I admire a consistent man, Tom Scott. Be as conscientious as you please, but don't for Heaven's sake run amok in it.

Johnny Tite, who is in love with Annie, puts it with equal bluntness :

> He's thrown away a jolly good chance of getting rid of a burnt-out business and putting his wife and family into comfort. Religious selfishness, that's what I call it.

Although the ideals and vitality of youth suffer constraint by the rigidity of Scott's principles, neither Annie nor Leonard rebels violently. Leonard is perhaps too young to revolt : but his day will surely come. Annie is well disciplined and her spirit flutters but feebly with desire for freedom. Nevertheless permission to attend the dance makes her pulse quicken and she prepares herself eagerly for this inconceivable pleasure. But in the end she is herself conquered by the indomitable strength of her father's principles. " Prejudices," Wicksteed calls them, but Annie replies :

> He has got a lot of prejudices, hasn't he ? Sometimes—lately—I've wondered if they weren't more than prejudices, real convictions.

Her respect for her father is great and she voluntarily abstains from the dance. She cannot hurt this man whom she is constrained to admire :

> I—I—think it is brave whenever a man hurts himself for a cause—even if it does seem a silly cause.

Thomas Scott saves his soul : he refuses what to his perverted view seems to be the devil's price. We are forced to revere the old man for all his fanaticism, as he stands on the rock of his immutable opinions amid the slowly rising tide of poverty. We feel that these waves will never shift the foundations of his belief, though the slow abrasion of the newer ideals of youth will finally wear away the footing of this lonely old puritan.

The construction of the play is weaker than that of *Chains*. Both plays depend less on incident than on ideas, and both are deficient in interesting characterization. In *Chains* none of the characters is arresting, though Thomas Scott himself is not without striking qualities. However perverse

his views may be, he has a certain grandeur. It must however be admitted that the atmosphere and setting of both plays are mean and drab. It is an unedifying, if pathetic, sight to see poor, devitalized creatures beating in vain against prison walls. As if to add to the depressing effect they seem for a moment on the verge of escape, only to relapse into dreary servitude, clutched back to bondage by the relentless hand of petty circumstance. The greyness of the picture is relieved by no touch of colour. The very conversation and language are realistic to the extreme of banality. No spark of poetry alleviates the dingy scene. Yet in any account of the drama of the period these plays claim attention. They show to what extremes the dramatist was carried by devotion to a realistic treatment of the problems of middle-class life in the beginning of the twentieth century. If they do nothing else, they serve the valuable purpose of demonstrating the limits of pure realism.

In some respects a cleverer play, but from our point of view less interesting, is *Miss Robinson* (1918), the story of a secretary to a wealthy and influential member of Parliament to whose son she becomes engaged. The intrigue is original, though the essence of the plot is not novel, and the story is cleverly worked out. But there is much improbability and some of the stage devices are a little obvious. It stands apart from *Chains* and *The Price of Thomas Scott* as depending little on ideas and much on incident ; and credit is due for the very effective situation created at the end of the first act by the dying confession of the old servant, Mattie Hine, whose mouth has been kept closed for so many years by skilfully administered bribery. It is excellent melodrama so far as it goes ; but it is not kept up, and the plot becomes somewhat thin at the end.

The play affords opportunity for the juxtaposition of the aristocratic world and the humbler circles to which Miss Robinson belongs and which Miss Baker knows so well how to depict. The Masseys and the Scotts belong to it too. But it is introduced here with comic effect, and although Miss Robinson's mother and her sister Ivy are sketched with

skill and sympathy, we feel that in this aristocratic drawing-room they are ridiculous if only for their incongruity. All the characters are distinctly sketched, but they make no strong appeal. Not less than in the rest of her work Miss Baker fails to reveal that greatness of human nature which is not necessary for clever and even effective stage-plays but which is essential for the creation of great drama. Except perhaps in the character of Thomas Scott she has not succeeded in raising life above mediocrity. Like Stanley Houghton and most of the realistic dramatists of middle-class life, she gives pictures of remarkable verisimilitude and spares no detail of the trivial circumstances, the petty thoughts and the dull expression which only too truly represent the cramped life of the majority. Furthermore, Miss Baker infuses into her two most interesting plays vital and important ideas. But these things without the quality of human greatness are inadequate for the achievement of great art.

3. GITHA SOWERBY

Miss Githa Sowerby won a notable place in the drama of the early twentieth century by her very remarkable play, *Rutherford and Son*. This play, which was produced at the Court Theatre, London, in January, 1912, is another drama springing from the clash of parent and child. "Rutherford & Son" is the name of a firm of glass manufacturers in the north of England. We may judge the village of Grantley to be on the Northumbrian fells. We imagine the furnaces shedding a lurid glare into the frosty night, illuminating the bleak, barren waste around this hive of modern industry. John Rutherford has made the business; he lives for it, and it personifies for him all that is worth while in life. He professes to have toiled unrelentingly for the sake of his children, but in reality "Rutherford & Son" is his only god: it is the Moloch to which he would sacrifice his whole family. Concentrated with terrible energy on his work for forty years, he has become hard and brutal. All tenderness has been dried from his heart by the heat of his passion

for " Rutherford's " : he is the feared and hated bully of his loveless home.

His children, educated and to a certain extent refined, have nothing in common with the grim and lonely old tyrant. John, with his Harrow schooling, has turned out weak and useless. He has now returned to the works and lives in this dreadful home with his wife, a London clerk whom he has married disastrously. The other son, Richard, is an enthusiastic young clergyman, utterly despised by his father. " As for what you call your work, I don't know any more about it than a bairn, and I haven't time to learn." That is all the sympathy he has for Richard. He regards him as a harmless fool. " There are more ways than one of shirking life," he says to him, " and religion's one of them." Then there is Janet, a poor withered woman of thirty-six. The inclement atmosphere of this cheerless life has dried the sap out of her. The pathos of it is that she realizes not only what is but what might have been. When at length she bursts the bonds in desperation it is to seek life in the love of Martin, the foreman at the works. Rutherford casts her out of his house without ruth and dismisses Martin, the trusted servant of six and twenty years. Before she goes she speaks her heart to her father :

> Oh, you've no pity . . . I was thirty-six. Gone sour. Nobody'd ever come after me. Not even when I was young. You took care o' that. Half of my life was gone, well-nigh all of it that mattered . . . What have I had of it, afore I go back to the dark? What have I had of it? Tell me that. Tell me!

For very boredom, because she must use her vitality in some way, she had quite unnecessarily worked as a domestic servant in her rich father's house. And all the while even the poor women in the village had their lives.

> The women down there know what I wanted . . . with their bairns wrapped in their shawls and their men to come home at night time. I've envied them—envied them their pain, their poorness—the very times they hadn't bread. Theirs isn't the dead empty house, the blank o' the moors; they got something to fight, something to be feared of. They got life, those women we send cans o' soup to out o' pity when their bairns are born. Me a lady! with work for a man on my hands, passion for a man in my heart! I'm common—common.

Only Ann, Rutherford's sister, a cross-grained old woman, as dour and bitter as her brother, is acclimatized to this awful place. She shares something of his superstitious devotion to " Rutherford's " and her reverence is transferred to the person of her brother himself. The revolt of the younger generation against his tyranny is a shock to the foundation of her faith. But she has no love for Rutherford, only a blind veneration rooted in fear, and perhaps a certain crude sympathy with his cold, hard nature which she shares.

Gradually we see the old man deserted by his unloving and unloved children. He parts without a pang with Richard, who is going away to another curacy. Janet's departure is shrouded in disgrace as in anger he casts her away. The departure of John follows a great struggle. This weak invertebrate has happened on a valuable process which would lift the ship of " Rutherford & Son " over the rocks on which it is in peril of wreck. Rutherford is struggling with grim determination to save the business, and by sheer brute force of a bullying personality he extracts from Martin the secret which John had guarded from every one else, but with which he was preparing to bargain with his father. Having got the secret Rutherford dismisses Martin for his intrigue with Janet and faces the helpless savagery of his injured son. It is a fight between a bull and a viper : neither is in the end victorious but each is sorely hurt. John leaves his wife and child after stealing from his father's cash box all the money he can find. The agonized appeal of his imploring wife fails to prevent this last act of degradation : despite her he damns his own soul. That his son could do so low an act pierces the old man to the quick : at last he is broken.

Miss Sowerby has painted a terrible picture, but the lonely figure of Rutherford though forbidding is magnificent. He has something of the vast proportions of Michael Angelo's art, or the great, rough boldness of a Rodin. He is vital with boundless energy, which, concentrated into a narrow channel of egoism, carries everything on its irresistible tide. He is a complete egoist. His love for " Rutherford's " is

only a vicarious love of self. If he scorns one son and hates the other it is because they have failed to subordinate themselves to " Rutherford's." He needs them to perpetuate " Rutherford's " after he has gone : he needs them to perpetuate himself. His is the paternal instinct slightly shifted. At the root of parental love is the instinct of race preservation, of perpetuation of man's life and man's work It is the same instinctive longing which makes men refuse to disbelieve in the immortality of the soul. The race lives because it believes utterly in its own life : the idea even of individual annihilation is incompatible in most men with that faith on which life as a whole depends. In Rutherford vital energy is so vehement that he has concentrated his whole being on the one thing which symbolizes his activity—the business which he has made. His will to project himself beyond his transient span of life is not directed into the usual channel of parental instinct, but into his business. If his children are not subservient to his egoistic purpose he has no use for them. " Rutherford's " is to him what children are to most men. His children are step-children and he flings them aside.

Perhaps his most human act is the dismissal of Martin. The old servant is invaluable to the works, and yet he is cast away. Although Rutherford seeks perpetuation through " Rutherford's " there was a time, before his children became what they are, when he had shared the human desire to found a family. He had tried to make gentlemen of his sons, he had wanted to make a lady of his daughter. Still he shows resentment if Janet alleviates her intolerable *ennui* with menial work. It cuts across an old habit of mind : it wounds the egoism of a former, blander day. Once again this simpler form of parental pride flares up with a destroying flame when Martin, his servant, dares to tamper with his daughter. But his anger with Janet is less for the shame that she has cast upon herself and her family than because she has deprived " Rutherford's " of an irreplaceable workman. But this time he must inflict hurt on " Rutherford's " with his own hand : he is compelled by his own pride

and also by his desire to keep the works above reproach to get rid of Martin.

It is a drama of struggle. He is not sufficiently concerned to struggle with Richard, but Rutherford spares no energy and will in fighting for John's secret. Unable to beat down the obstinacy of John himself, he shifts the attack to Martin and wins the secret from him. Against Janet, who is in some respects a reincarnation of her father's relentless energy, he loses. But the most dramatic and the greatest struggle is at the end of the play. Mary, the wife whom John deserts, is all that these northerners are not. Gentler in texture, she is however not without pluck and tenacity of will ; but her will is more elastic and she has a liveliness which makes her more than a match for the old bully with his rigid obstinacy. She has a child and she seeks the provision which his father will never make. She has looked to the bottom of her husband's shallow character and she knows he will not return. Now she faces the old man and her mother-instinct gives her intuition and courage. With shrewd insight she perceives the joint in his armour, and she stabs him to the quick :

> . . . You've lost everything you have in the world. John's gone—and Richard—and Janet. They won't come back. You're alone now and getting old, with no one to come after you. When you die Rutherford's will be sold—somebody'll buy it and give it a new name perhaps, and no one will even remember that you made it. That'll be the end of all your work. Just—nothing. You've thought of that. I've seen you thinking of it as I've sat by you and watched you. And now it's come . . .

And so she bargains. He is to provide for her and the child. She is to have complete control for ten years and then the boy will be his to train as the future master of "Rutherford's." The old flame of egoism flares up again : or is it at last a glow of human love ? Throughout the play the hard old man has shown no scrap of interest in the child, who is not brought on to the stage. Now at length, with great dramatic skill, the dramatist shows us the convergence of the adamantine but broken old man and the hapless infant. The play ends enigmatically. Has the babe insinuated itself into the

withered old heart and revived a spark of human love, or is it but another faggot for the fire well-nigh extinct for lack of fuel? Thus the play ends:

> *Rutherford.* . . . What would ha' gone to the winds, scattered and useless, 'll be his. He'll come on, young and strong, when my work's done, and Rutherford's 'll stand up firm and safe out o' the fight and the bitterness—Rutherford's that his grandfather gave his life to build up.
>
> *Mary.* (*Stopping him with a gesture.*) Hush!
>
> *Rutherford.* What is it? (*They both listen.*) The little lad. He's waking!
>
> *Mary runs out. The room is very silent as Rutherford sits sunk in his chair, thinking.*

Of all the plays discussed in this chapter this is indubitably the most remarkable. It is well constructed, the incidents are sufficient yet not intrusive, and the plot moves with firm and easy tread. Given the characters and setting, the drama unfolds inevitably; and the premisses are not far fetched. The play is based on struggle, and struggle is the unavoidable interaction of such characters as these. It is terribly real, and the darkness of the tragic picture is intensified by ruthless realism.

Although the treatment is realistic the play rises above the meanness which we have seen as the frequent accompaniment of an exact depiction of the external details of modern life. Miss Sowerby has an imaginative grasp which apprehends the elusive human aura beyond the visible facts of existence. The play is consequently touched with that quality which raises common life above the commonplace. She perceives the greatness of the human soul, even when it inhabits a very narrow tenement of clay; she sees and captures the spiritual effluence which surrounds even so coarse a materialist as Rutherford or so degraded a creature as the wretched Janet. With all his brutishness the old man is ennobled by the very intensity of his will to persist. Janet is struggling against her chains like Miss Baker's Charley Wilson and Maggie Massey; yet she is glorified out of all relationship with them by the resurgent spirit of all motherhood which puts a light in her eye and a glow in her poor

soul as she steps out into the cold, unknown world, alone but unrepining.

Miss Sowerby makes subtle and effective use of the environment of the characters. The force of heredity is skilfully brought out: the influence of Rutherford on his children is obvious in the superficial sense, but in Janet the sternness of the flinty old man reappears and contrasts strangely with the gentleness of Richard and the weakness of John which we are led to regard as a maternal legacy. But the most striking contribution to the environment of the drama is the wild, inhospitable moorland setting. We have seen how Synge carried the atmosphere of his Aran seas and Wicklow mountains on to the stage, and we shall see how similarly Mr. Masefield has succeeded in bringing on to the stage the spirit of the Severn which is as it were one of the *dramatis personæ* of *The Tragedy of Nan*. Similarly Miss Sowerby seems to bring into her play the chill of the fells and the dreary darkness of the long northern nights. The spirit is shrivelled by the greyness and gloom which pervade that loveless home. It is an unpleasant atmosphere which recalls *Wuthering Heights*, but it has a certain wild magnificence which repels and yet attracts. The presence of Mary, a typical southerner, heightens the effect. With her we are awed by this ferocity of man and external nature. She has been reared in very different surroundings:

> I lived in Devonshire when I was a child, and everywhere there were lanes. But here—it's all so old and stern—this great stretch of moor, and the fells—and the trees—all bent one way, crooked and huddled.

In other respects one is reminded of the awe-inspiring quality of the Brontë mind, and whilst we feel the horror of this cold, frightening picture of savage humanity, we are compelled by its truth, its power, and its greatness. It is not a pleasant play, but it is not to be withstood. It is perhaps inappropriate to class it with the "Drama of Revolt," if by that we mean a propagandist drama dealing mainly with ideas. The ideas are there, but they are subordinated to human interest; and in the end that alone is the touchstone

of true art. The element of beauty is to be found only in the work as a unified whole and perhaps to some extent in the imaginative quality which extends to the language itself. Although the characters are very ordinary people and the treatment is realistic, the realism does not lead to that meanness of language which mars such plays as those of Miss Baker. Even Rutherford with all his roughness is not common, and although his speech is crude it is touched with imagination. Certainly the drama is almost insupportably awful, but it amply evokes those emotions of pity and terror which Aristotle demanded as the essence of tragic effect. True, it does not end with the death which we are prone to regard as the conventional tragic ending ; but the dénouement is serious and solemn, and if the final note is perhaps one of hope, it springs from a belief that the purgation of pity and terror has extended beyond the onlooker to the protagonist himself.

We have examined three dramatists who in 1912 stood out prominently as representative of the new spirit of revolt, especially the revolt of youth against the tyrannical ideals of age. Suddenly youth found its opportunity and whilst the solvent process of war destroyed many of the old conventions youth was vindicated by its heroic effort and at the same time found channels of positive activity which diverted attention from the old iconoclasm. We are to-day in a new age with a new atmosphere and the gospel of 1912 is apt to ring false. Stanley Houghton has gone ; Miss Baker has changed her vein ; Miss Sowerby is struck silent. Amongst many they voiced the rebellious spirit of their day : other dramatists express the creative optimism or the disillusioned cynicism of the new age.

CHAPTER XV

IRISH DRAMATISTS

In previous chapters we have examined the work of four of the most important contributors to the early work of the Irish dramatic revival. Three of them stand out for the importance of their pioneer work in preparing the way for others, whilst Synge stands apart and supreme without equal and without competitor. There are, however, many other names which are of importance, and several claim particular attention. These in the order of treatment are Mr. Padraic Colum, Mr. Lennox Robinson, Mr. T. C. Murray, Mr. St. John Ervine.

1. COLUM

A noticeable feature in the dramatic work of the pioneers was its imaginative, poetic quality. The spirit of romance and the play of fancy invested the work of Mr. Yeats and Mr. Martyn with a mantle of poesy. If Synge and Lady Gregory infused a more matter-of-fact realism into much of their work the quality of imagination was always vividly present and we feel that their work springs from a source essentially poetic. To a certain extent this is also true of Mr. Colum's work, but other tendencies are to be found in his drama. We trace also the realism and bourgeois element which, despite an Irish setting, remind one rather of the modern English realistic school than of the drama of Synge and Lady Gregory.

The Land (1905) is a dour picture of the intensely Irish attachment of the worker to the soil. Murtagh Cosgar is a

hard-bitten idealist, romantic in his love for the land which he acquires by purchase at the cost of hard work and hard living, but harsh in his ruthless treatment of the son and daughter who alone of his family will consent to stay at home. Sally is the farm drudge, but despite her acquiescent obedience to her father's tyranny she has a spark in her dull soul and it finds a response in the equally dull Cornelius, son of Cosgar's despised neighbour, Martin Douras. These two farmers are antithetic Irish types. Cosgar is practical, with all his romantic love of the soil, but Martin Douras is an unpractical idealist who reads and dreams and talks. His greatest achievement has been to go to prison for " the cause." He can make patriotic speeches about the land, but he is apt to leave his own untended. Hence there is no dowry for his daughter Ellen whom Matt Cosgar wants to marry. This is an insuperable objection in the eyes of Matt's father, who would never consent to his son's marrying an undowered girl, still less a daughter of the despised Martin Douras. The scene is thus set for violent conflict. The old conflict between Cosgar and Douras is brought into a more intimate sphere as it becomes a struggle between Cosgar and his son Matt. On the one hand Cosgar is dragged back by his dislike of the proposed match, whilst he is pushed on by his desire that Matt shall inherit his dearest possession, his land. Yet the old man, though broken in spirit, refuses to give way. With tragic obstinacy he dares Matt to do his worst.

There is another conflict in which Matt is protagonist. Ellen is lured by the call of the city, the romantic glow of American streets as they blaze in the imagination of the girls and boys who come in to take farewell of their friends before setting out on their great western venture. Matt would take Ellen and join the band, but the soil grips him too tightly. And Ellen, who has been trained as a teacher, is unsuited to stay on the land. She puts the harsh fact truly when she asks if he thinks she could live in a farmer's house. Murtagh Cosgar, broken and aged by his son's apparently resolute intention to leave him and the farm, is at length

willing to give his consent to Matt's marriage ; but Ellen is now the obstacle. She sighs for a wider life than is to be found in this secluded spot and its narrow round. She has stayed there long enough, she says. What she wants is her own way : she wants to know the world. And so Matt's offer is unavailing. She is but another of the many young women from Ibsen's Nora to Vivie Warren, from Ann Leete to the Nora who lived in the shadow of the glen. She represents the new spirit of youth which we have seen in so much of the English drama of the first decade of this century.

So Matt decides after all to leave the land and go to America where he hopes to make a home which Ellen will consent to share when he returns to fetch her. Meantime she will take her place in the ranks of the world's workers and teach in a school. Despite the atmosphere of conflict and the almost tragic tendency of the play the ending is not tragic. The lonely figure of old Murtagh Cosgar in the last scene is full of pathos, and one feels that the comic end is unnaturally forced and flavoured with a certain sourness of cynicism. After all Murtagh is not left alone, for he has the scarcely whole-witted Sally to support his declining years and he bestows his daughter's hand on Cornelius Douras and promises them the land that he has at length succeeded in buying. But the chief impression left by the play is the pain, old but ever new, that it is only from the wreck of ideals that new ideals can arise. The older generation has fought and won the land. It has taken the best from the lives of men like Martin Douras, the reader, the talker, the schemer, who had felt even the pangs of prison, and the intense and strenuous effort of workers like Murtagh Cosgar. And now that it is won for the new generation the young men and women want not the land of old Ireland but the cities of young America. A comedy made of such stuff is bitter comedy.

The characters of the play are well drawn although they are not strikingly original. At the same time it is only fair to remember that the play was produced in 1905 and that one is apt to judge it by comparison with later plays, whilst

forgetting that they are later. If it came after Ibsen, Mr. Shaw and Mr. Granville Barker and even after Synge's early work, it preceded Stanley Houghton and much of a similar kind that will be noted later in this chapter.

Mr. Colum's next play, *The Fiddler's House* (1907),[1] is in almost every respect a more interesting and more beautiful play. Like its predecessor it is intensely Irish, but in its human qualities it outsoars the limitations of time and place. We have seen that Synge stood out for his ability to convey through the medium of actuality the substance of his powerful imagination, so that he irradiated his crude, sometimes even sordid, material with the auroral glow of poetry. His followers and imitators have often succeeded in giving a picture of Irish life scarcely less faithful and sometimes almost as humorous, but very rare are the plays which even approach his in imaginative quality. *The Fiddler's House* is the one that undoubtedly approaches him most nearly in this respect.

Conn Hourican, the fiddler, is at once wanderer, tippler and artist. Although he is a distinctly individual character he typifies what is beautiful and what is weakest in the Irish temperament. His love of his art is genuine, though it is degraded by his selfish vanity. Basely weak though he is, to the neglect of the two daughters who love him so devotedly, there is a certain wistful and romantic beauty surrounding the figure of the old fiddler. The call of the road sings in his blood, and we feel the intense self-restraint that must have been necessary to keep him a home-abiding father for five years. When the play opens we see the shackles loosening and we know that nothing can now prevent him from submitting to the urgency of his instincts. Drink is an attraction, but the praise of the admiring throng assembled in the public house quenches a deeper thirst in the musician's soul. Stronger yet to the born wanderer is the thirst for the road. He is not quite oblivious to the attraction of home, of the land one owns ; but the call of the land cannot compete with the lure of art and the glamour of far-off

[1] A rehandling of an earlier play, *Broken Soil*, 1903,

places. These rebels against convention may be troublesome elements in society, but if they persist even in these sophisticated days we should remember that the common-sense and practical order of civilized life is none the worse for some leavening of nonconformity, especially if the nonconformist has that in his soul which feeds the dim-glowing fire of romance.

Yet withal the old fiddler is a base fellow. He is a petty cadger and a mean liar breaking solemn promises and stooping to paltry shifts to deceive his own daughters. If the play depended on him alone it might be interesting and up to a point beautiful, but it would not attain the level of greatness. Yet it has a grandeur, to which the romantic character of Conn contributes but which depends primarily on the fine humanity and rare qualities of Maire Hourican. Maire, the elder daughter, has been the prop of the family since her mother's death. Still a girl in her early twenties she has gained experience of life in a hard school: only a girl of substance and worth could have kept the rambler off the roads and brought up Anne decently. Yet a fire smoulders within her. Not for nothing is she her father's daughter. The blood of Honor Gilroy, her grandmother, once a proud beauty thirsting for admiration and praise, runs in her veins and gives a throb to her heart. She cannot repress an envious wish, when Anne shows her the verses indicted by her lover, James Moynihan, that some one would put her into a song or into a poem. She has a lover, Brian MacConnell, but he plays her false.

At the beginning of the play we notice a hard line running through Maire's treatment of her father. We can well believe that without it she would never have controlled him as she evidently has. But sorrow softens her. Her father has fallen into the old bad ways: she realizes that her hardly fought game is lost. She meets his lying excuses with pitiful apathy: "It's no matter at all now." Yet there is a maternal gentleness in her compassionate comprehension of the weak old man. Anne is scared by the prospect of life, but Maire understands and almost excuses him.

But she is quite hopeless. Anne thinks he may reform again : she knows better. She has no blame for this foolish old man : if he were not a father he would be but an errant child. As it is there is no hope of amendment and she will expect none.

Yet a greater blow is to fall. Brian MacConnell is a headstrong lad, always losing self-control and rushing into violent quarrels. That she can forgive. Now she learns that it was he who tempted her weak father to break his promise and go to Flynn's public house with him, that Brian had preferred a night of drinking to dancing with her at the Moynihans'. A deep distress has humanized her soul and she has learned to judge herself more hardly and others more leniently. Conn has rounded on her with the accusation that she wants to shine before the people of the place. At first she repudiates the suggestion ; but in the end she recognizes that it is just. " I won't believe it," she cries. But she does believe it. Anne comes in and their father goes on to talk of their beautiful, vain grandmother, Honor Gilroy. It eats into Maire's heart. She has learned a great lesson in sympathy.

She knows how the old man has longed to attend the fair,—the Feis at Ardagh : he burns to repeat his great musical triumph which he loves to brag of, his magnificent performance in the old days at Granard. Maire's objections have disappeared. With gentle intuition she suggests his going. Quietly she slips out and when she returns with the famous Granard fiddle in her hand the childlike old man is overjoyed. The bond between father and daughter has been reknit by this tender act.

Mere description cannot convey the subtle psychology and the deep pathos of this delicate ending of the second act. Mr. Colum concentrates here his finest art in portraying the childish and almost innocent nature of the wretched fiddler. As the old man, his passing wrath of pride subsided, throws himself willingly and gratefully on the capable strength of this gentle, comprehending woman, we feel that we are witnessing the tender ministration of eternal

womanhood, most perfect in an expression of her maternal instincts, to man the ever needy child. A scene such as that seems to justify the judgement that in this play Mr. Colum has outsoared the limitations of time and place and has shown us the justice of the statement that great art partakes of universal truth.

The third act is beautiful, but it falls below Act II. in tensity and subtlety. Maire has looked into her own heart and she has taken her resolution of self-sacrifice. With no trace of morbidity she decides on renunciation. She makes over the cottage and the bit of land, which are hers, to Anne, so that her sister may marry and settle down. She realizes the pity of it all: she feels alone in an empty vastness. Not a man but has proved false to her, and alone she must face the world. She summons her pride to her rescue and makes light of the aching loneliness: she will fall back on her own strength and laugh and hold up her head again. It is not easy to see her motives in dismissing Brian and crushing the red flower of love that is thrusting its urgent petals against the walls of her aching heart. It is primarily her belief that her first duty is to her father and her knowledge that the only life for him is the life of the vagabond. She cannot let him go alone, but if she goes marriage is impossible for her. Blended with this feeling is a sense of the instability of Brian; though one may believe that if marriage had been otherwise possible she would not have feared the chances of life with the man whom she loved and who, with all his frailties, loved her. There is no doubt of the pain inflicted on her heart by the plucking out of love and her final great act of renunciation.

As has been suggested, the third act is weaker than the other two and Mr. Colum seems to have been conscious of this himself when writing later of the play he described it as "two acts of a play." Or it may be that he feels that the play is weak in its dénouement. Without demanding that a play shall be either tragic or comic in the conventional sense, we are justified in demanding that it shall finish and not merely cease. A work of art must have unity and purpose, and

these can be attained only by rounding it off at both the beginning and the end. The dramatist arouses and strains our emotions, but to complete his work he must produce that relaxation which is necessary for pleasure. We can take pleasure in the tensest tragic passion if the kathartic effect is ensured by the dramatist. And how is katharsis effected but by the relaxation of the strained emotions? If the process is not carried through to its logical conclusion we are left *en l'air* and we feel thwarted. *The Fiddler's House* closes on so doubtful a note that we are apt to feel something of the dissatisfaction that inconclusive art necessarily implies.

Although the final note is doubtful there is no question that the dominant quality of the play partakes of tragedy rather than comedy. In the first place there is little or no humour in the play. The only trace of comedy is to be found in the character of Conn. Throughout the play the fiddler is on the verge of doing some honest labour: repeatedly he avers his longing to be at work. Yet on every occasion danger is averted by his irrepressible imagination which diverts his physical energy into an emotional channel or dissipates it in a cloud of loquacity. One recognizes subtle ridicule of one of the characteristic weaknesses of the Irish whose power to do often evaporates as mere talk. Such a character as Conn Hourican is insufficient to support a tragic play, and *The Fiddler's House* depends ultimately on the character of Maire. She is essentially a tragic figure—whatever the dénouement—and if we judge this to be a great play it is because of the greatness of this central figure. On her the play rests.

Mr. Colum's lack of humour also deprives his dialogue of the racy quality which is so remarkable in Synge and Lady Gregory. In other respects his dialogue is inferior to the best that Irish dramatists have written. If he is a poet it is in his conception of character and his creation of atmosphere, and although there are happy exceptions one must admit that on the whole his dialogue is not that of a poet. It lacks imaginative reach; it is pedestrian beside the lilt and

rhythmical stride of Synge's. But if by contrast it seems prosaic, it is at least adequate to its purpose; and in comparison with the majority of his contemporaries Mr. Colum holds a high place even as a stylist.

Another play by Mr. Colum calls for reference, but not such lengthy discussion. *Thomas Muskerry* (1910) is a disappointing play. Instead of exploiting the poetic vein which promised so much in *The Fiddler's House* Mr. Colum works rather on the lines of *The Land*. The central figure is Thomas Muskerry, a Workhouse Master, who is surrounded by a group of grasping, mean-spirited relatives of the small shopkeeper class. The play is remarkable more for its realistic treatment than for its imaginative range. We see accurate pictures of the inner economy of an Irish poorhouse and of the domestic and business struggles of the *petite bourgeoisie*. Despite the pathos which invests the figure of old Muskerry he scarcely rises to greatness and there is little to lift the play above the ugliness of commonplace life. Even more than in *The Land* we are conscious of a resemblance to the drab realism of the contemporary English drama. It is matter for regret that Mr. Colum has not made more of Myles Gorman, the old blind piper who brings into the murky atmosphere of the pauper ward some rays of spring sunshine. He holds kinship with Conn Hourican. Imagination, a love of music and above all a love of the freedom of the roads and of the open air raise his spirit above the meanness of his environment. When the Master lies dead on the workhouse pallet we are glad to hear the music of the old piper. Having done the last reverential offices for his former master he is led out into the sunshine for which he has longed, and as we hear his pipes in the distance we know that despite his blindness there are sights of beauty dazzling his poetic vision. So the play ends and the spirit feels relief after the tale of mercenary scheming and callous brutality which have driven Thomas Muskerry to a pauper's death. This character is used well at the finish, but he does not serve to raise the play as a whole on to the poetic plane. Yet only a poet could have conceived Myles Gorman, just as only a poet

could have written *The Fiddler's House*. We may nourish the hope that Mr. Colum will return to a more poetic method and in the future surpass his too small but notable contribution to the Irish drama. The dramatist who created Maire Hourican has the capacity to do great things.

2. ROBINSON

If the premature death of Synge in 1909 is taken arbitrarily as the dividing point between the first and second stages of the Irish dramatic movement Mr. Colum must be regarded as belonging to both phases with the bulk of his work before that date. Since then *Thomas Muskerry* is his only considerable play, but one hopes that more is to come. Mr. Robinson, however, belongs to the later stage. His earliest work, *The Clancy Name*, was first produced in 1908, a few months before Synge's death ; but this one-act tragedy was revised and in its new form performed for the first time in September 1909.

In this early piece Mr. Robinson gave evidence of a firm dramatic grip. An admirable idea is conceived and up to a point developed. Unfortunately it is finally frittered away. The play follows the lead of Synge and Colum in dealing with the peasant life of Ireland. It turns on the pride of race and the hard, even grasping, endurance of a certain type of Irish peasant, of a woman dependent only on herself to defeat the pressure of circumstances and by tenacity of purpose and narrow concentration of effort to salve the small inheritance of land and win through from poverty to financial stability. Mrs. Clancy, who had married her cousin, is out and out a Clancy ; and she inherits the strong family pride of her clan. Left a widow she has at length paid off the debts that loaded her farm and she feels that now she and her only son, John, can look the world in the face. All her hopes are suddenly shattered by the awful confession by John that he it is who murdered Jamsey Power. The terrible truth is forced from John by the agony of remorse that holds him in its grip. A few

heated words, a chance blow and he had found himself in the presence of a corpse. He had hidden Power's body in the bog, but he could not hide the memory of this ghastly thing from his imagination. He cannot continue to live this life of torment and he tells his mother that he will give himself up to the police. Then the real conflict begins. The wretched boy distracted with the sorrow of guilt longs for sympathy, or at least for an outlet to his pent emotions. Mrs. Clancy fails to appreciate his agony; all that concerns her is the family disgrace.

The tragic writers have all shown that the essence of tragedy is not necessarily the great crime but the small fault. It is not the great cruelty of Goneril and Regan but the folly of Lear and the bluntness of Cordelia which give rise to tragedy. The tragedy of Hamlet springs not from the crime of Claudius but from the frailty of the prince. Here it is not in John Clancy's murderous deed, but in the egoism of his mother that the seed of tragedy exists. When sympathy is needed by these two tormented souls, there is only a wider estrangement and a gradually deepening resentment. Each is possessed of self-pity, when mutual love alone could bind them together in a common sorrow. "I *must* tell," says John, in the desperate anguish of a guilt-stricken conscience. "I say you won't," retorts his mother.

> I'll never bear it. 'Twill kill me, 'twill kill me—they'll point at me as "the mother of John Clancy, the murderer."

Blinded by her own pride she is unable to appreciate his state of soul.

> And what good will it do *you* at all? 'Twon't bring Jamsey back to life to go telling the police. You'll only kill me, and 'tisn't one murder but two that you'll have on your soul.

His reply has no meaning to her:

> It's—it's—for my own peace of mind. Mother, let me go!

This is a terrific situation, but the young dramatist did not succeed in exploiting it. The dénouement lacks

inevitability. We are told through the mouths of witnesses of the runaway horse, the little child in danger and the heroic act of John who saves the child and then stands, suicidally we presume, to be killed himself. It is all very convenient and melodramatic, but it is not quite convincing. We are not wholly unprepared for John's suicide, which is perhaps the only logical dramatic issue. But the heroic deed and the appearance of self-sacrifice—for it seems to be only apparent—though they are beautiful sentiments savour rather of the film than of real tragedy.

In 1909 Mr. Robinson produced *The Cross Roads*, certainly his least successful play. It is a play with a very definite thesis. It tells how Ellen M'Carthy, after a successful career as member of a Gaelic League Club in Dublin, returns to Ballygurteen full of ideas as to how she can serve Ireland by means of scientific farming. Under her tuition Ballygurteen blossoms with prosperity. Yet her own farm, into possession of which she has entered by marriage with Tom Dempsey, is a hopeless failure. So we see her prematurely aged, grey and slatternly, amidst the memories of dead children, surrounded by hens that will not lay and fields that yield no harvest, and tied to a drunken husband. A shocking affair, but not the inevitable result of scientific farming which has proved such a signal success amongst her neighbours. Mr. Robinson seems to feel the difficulty, and so he tries to account for the misfortune by attributing it to a curse which has been laid upon Ellen and her work because she contravened the law of love. She had really loved Brian Connor, but she had refused the Dublin man because she thought her duty called her to the land and she had married Dempsey because he had a farm to which she could apply her scientific knowledge for the benefit of Ireland. The play is not held together by the thesis, and straggling over a long period of years it falls hopelessly to pieces. Without strength of characterization it lacks dramatic conviction, and thus alone do we escape being dragged down to its own level of dark despair.

Still working the vein of peasant drama Mr. Robinson

produced *Harvest* in 1910 and followed it up with *Patriots* in 1912. Neither of these plays is tragic in the conventional sense, but both have harsh, even bitter, endings. *Harvest* depicts the evil consequences of applying to a rural people education which tends to unfit them for any calling but that of the town. Of all the family only Maurice Hurley remains at home to help his father run the farm. The rest have all been educated, and to greater or less degree they are out of touch with the old life. Patrick has got on and never even writes. Bob is a solicitor and he has too many expenses to be willing to help his father in need. Timothy is a priest with interests and concerns more enthralling than the ties of family. Jack is a chemist's assistant in Dublin and he has married the daughter of an infuriated Colonel. He is willing to help his father, but the soft life of the city has made him incapable of hard work and his refined wife is so disheartened by the vicissitudes of butter-making that after three weeks she refuses to play at being a dairy-maid. Mary went to England, but educated beyond domestic service she rose to the status of typist and finding that unremunerative she had sold herself for finery and sumptuous living. The cost of educating the family had been so great that the farm has been starved and now old Hurley finds himself in pecuniary difficulties. Driven to desperation he commits arson for the sake of the insurance money. It is all very terrible, but it is a little hard to trace all this mass of misfortune to the ignorant folly of the educator. Education may be a very bad thing for an ignorant rural people, but it does not follow that the incredibly base ingratitude of priests and solicitors, the physical weakness of a chemist's assistant and the moral instability of a typist are to be traced to no other cause. Nor does it fully account for the incendiary tendencies of the parent. Yet education seems to be loaded with all the blame.

The question of thesis is perhaps not the most serious. What is more relevant from a critical point of view is the unfortunate confusion of Mary's melodramatic immorality with the misfortune of Hurley's farm. Although she ranges

herself alongside the decisive and clear-sighted young women of the drama of her day by averring that she entered a path of sin with open eyes and returns to that path with a full knowledge of its end, she has all the sentimental graces of the fallen girl of nineteenth century melodrama. In fact she is a person who does not exist. And she is more than slightly nauseating. None of the characters is vital, except perhaps the crude and violent Maurice, who still remains an unvarnished peasant.

Patriots described the situation created by the return in the year 1911 of a man who eighteen years before went to gaol for political murder. In place of the fiery spirit which had impelled him and his coadjutors to violence he finds the namby-pamby nationalism of a softer age. There is excellent portraiture in James Nugent's wife, once his enthusiastic helper, now a keen and successful business woman, but with no grain of sympathy with the old ideals which they had shared. Her two brothers are worthless fools alike in business and in politics. The rising spirit of the new nationalism, which recent Irish history has shown to be very real, inflames Nugent's cripple daughter, Rose, and her lover, Willie Sullivan. In them alone James Nugent finds sympathy and support. For the rest it is a mass of dead ashes in which no spark seems to glow. Nugent is billed to address a meeting of the League, but no one is there to hear him. The Moving Pictures are more than successful in their rivalry, and this patriot, who has sustained his soul through long years with the belief and hope that others were holding aloft the torch that he had brandished so ardently, now learns to his bitter dismay that the old fires are quenched and that he has outlived his generation. It is a broken, tragic figure that stumbles out under this last blow of disappointment.

But if there is a note of tragedy in this play it does not follow that it is great tragedy. The play moves on a low plane. A great part of it, dealing with the comic foibles of Bob and Harry Nugent, the business hardness of Ann Nugent, the wretched poverty of Mrs. Sullivan and her drunken husband, is mean. In this play, as in *Harvest* and

still more in *The Cross Roads*, Mr. Robinson's depiction of life is petty and even sordid. In *The Clancy Name* the harsh strain of Irish peasant character is apparent, and the egoism and smallness of human nature are thrust to the front. The painful realism reminds us of the bourgeois plays of the English stage, so accurate in their reproduction of the external features of modern society but grey and ugly and depressing. Synge with all his realism and his almost sardonic grimness does more than depress. He also opens the windows of the human heart and gives us a sight of its illimitable greatness. As we listen to the bursting of the storm of fate, we see the unbroken and unbreakable spirit of man rising above the broken body and triumphing beyond the wreck of human life. As has been well said of the awful horrors of *King Lear* the spirit suffers not compression but dilation as we witness the frail body and bruised spirit of the old king buffeted by the storms of heaven and lashed by the whip of cruelty. Mr. Robinson is restrained in his tragic effects, and none of the plays that we have noticed is tragic within the ordinary definition of the term except *The Clancy Name*. The picture of human nature which they represent is mean and lacks anything which dilates the spirit. Instead of feeling the greatness of the human soul we are impressed by ignoble futility.

This sensation is intensified by the bitter flavour which Mr. Robinson is apt to impart by his somewhat biting irony. It is not that tragic irony which serves to heighten the effect in great tragedy, a device used with such terrific effect by the writers of Greek tragedy, by Shakespeare so notably in *Othello*, but perhaps most remarkably in English by Milton in *Samson Agonistes*. That is a device which by raising the onlooker to the level of almost divine omniscience enables him to watch the awful workings of fate. Through this process of elevation we are lifted above the littleness of life and from a height, which the spirit shares, we regard with intensified benevolence the struggles of mankind caught in the toils of fate and perceive a larger sphere in which good and evil work to an ultimate goal of justice and retribution. Tragic

irony of such a kind is not finally depressing, but the petty irony of such a play as *The Clancy Name* resembles it only in name. It partakes rather of the nature of sarcasm, that mean trick of the devil, so alluring to clever youth. It is not the instrument of one who sees life steadily and sees it whole. It inevitably leaves a sour taste in the mouth.

When John Clancy is carried in dying his mother is concerned only with the danger lest in his delirium he betrays the terrible secret which will assuredly smirch for ever the unsullied Clancy name. Her fears are groundless and he dies without giving up the dreaded truth.

> *Father Mahony.* . . . Ah Mrs. Clancy, 'tis you should be the proud woman this day. I know well how proud you are of the Clancy name—you're a Clancy yourself—and how sorry you are to think your son has left no one to carry it on. But of all the Clancys, and they're a great family and a respected family, I venture to say that in years to come the greatest and most respected member of them will be your son, John Clancy, who gave his life to save a little child.
>
> *Mrs. Clancy* (*in a low voice, kneeling at John's side*). I'm sure it's very good of your reverence to say such things ; I thank God neither I nor my son, have ever brought disgrace on the Clancy name.
>
> *Father Mahony.* You haven't indeed, Mrs. Clancy, you should be proud this day to be the mother of John Clancy. . . . Let us pray for the soul of John Clancy. (*They all fall on their knees.*)

Thus the curtain falls on lying and deception. What mean wretches, what fools human beings are, we feel. Can they really hope, we ask, to fool God as they strive to fool others and themselves? Where is that ennobling, lustral effect which true tragedy ought and is able to give, purifying us with its pity and its terror ?

Just so is it absent from the other three plays we have discussed. In each one there is the same bitter, ironic flavour. We taste it in the brutal ending of *The Cross Roads* when Brian Connor comes at length to deliver Ellen from her bondage. At first she is inclined to escape with him, but she finally dismisses him and decides to remain with her drunken husband. In the end we see Tom lock her in the house, which is a prison-house of dirt, poverty and misery of spirit, whilst he goes out to drink, promising to return

and deal with her later. Such is the end of her high hopes and noble aspirations for Ireland which made her sacrifice love for patriotic fervour. It may be that the retribution is not unjust, but its application is very bitter. In *Harvest* the ending is scarcely less ironic. Jack and his useless wife desert the home for a newer land.

> I hope I'll never see this cursed place again; before a month there'll be a few thousand miles of clean salt water between me and Ireland. Ireland! I hate the very word!

So much for Jack. Mary goes back to her paramour. Only Maurice is left with the old man. At any rate there will be enough now to restore the financial basis of the farm. Patrick has sent £50. Really it is £50 sent to Mary by her lover as the price of her body. On this, augmented, if there is any luck, by the insurance money resulting from old Hurley's arson, Maurice can settle down in the old rut and marry Bridget. What a happy ending to so much trouble! After all Mr. Lordan, the doddering old schoolmaster who embodies the evil genius of education, has a lot on which to congratulate himself. A while before Maurice had cursed and threatened this poor unsuspecting old man for his evil deeds, for it was he who implanted in all his brothers and sisters this pestilent seed of education. Now he is ready to apologize. The irony of it!

> *Maurice.* . . . Here's my hand, Mr. Lordan, and I'm sorry for what I said to you a while ago. It's only to-day I'm beginning to understand what a terrible lot we owe you.
>
> *Lordan.* Not at all, Maurice, not at all. I only did the little I could—it wasn't much—I wish it was more . . . There's the Hayes' girls and two boys of Thomas O'Sullivan and Bridget Mahony from the forge—may God grant me a few more years of health and strength till I do with them what I've done with Mary and Patrick.
>
> *Bridget.* Amen to that. (*Maurice nods his head.*)

So falls the final curtain. In its bitterness it is comparable with the last exit of James Nugent in *Patriots*. The broken patriot walks slowly from the hall where no one has come to hear his lecture, to listen to him, the man who had given all for the cause. At any rate it is lucky for Jim, the care-

taker, whom the meeting has unfortunately prevented from attending the pictures.

Jim. Good-night to you. (*Looks at watch.*) Only twenty past eight. I can go and see the pictures after all. (*He switches off the light by degrees.*)

When the stage is quite dark the Curtain falls.

If these were all the plays that Mr. Robinson had written we should still have been obliged to notice his work in a book of this kind, if only as a striking representative of the Irish dramatists who before the Great War adopted the methods so much in vogue in the up-to-date English drama. As it is, Mr. Robinson has written other plays which lead one to believe that with *Patriots* he closed the first chapter of his work. Certainly when *The Dreamers* appeared in 1915 it marked a distinct change, and in his subsequent plays he has not relapsed into the early mood or manner. *The Dreamers* is an historical play dealing with Robert Emmet's abortive rebellion in 1803. What Mr. Robinson naturally is concerned with as a dramatist is the human element. He shows us enough of the historical background to enable us to arrange the public events on the scene of our imagination and deals with the struggle of Emmet with his half-hearted and finally faithless supporters; he shows us also a picture of Emmet's pluck and decision, his fidelity to those who were true to him; and through all is woven the slender thread of his love for Sarah Curran. He has succeeded in portraying Emmet with clearness of outline. We are able to recognize the features of Sarah and of the Brady family—Robert and Martin, ardent adherents who die in Emmet's cause, and John the eldest brother, who is unsympathetic and is finally left forlorn and embittered. But the stage is so crowded by the fifty characters or so who press on and off through three short acts that there is little scope for full-length character drawing. The result is consequently somewhat nebulous, and one has the feeling of not becoming sufficiently familiar with the people of the play to be intensely moved by their fortunes or misfortunes.

The welcome quality in this play is the absence of acrimony.

The dramatist seems to take a larger, fuller view of life and to regard human affairs more positively. That acerb, sneering commentary which we have noted in the earlier plays is after all destructive and merely negative. The title of the play is challenging and at first sight it might seem to betoken bitterness. What are these idealists, these men who strive after freedom, but dreamers of an idle day? Each in turn receives the shock which awakens him, or at any rate his followers, into actuality. We have seen such a rude awakening in the case of the patriot, James Nugent, whose dream drops from him and leaves him naked in his loneliness of heart. On the domestic plane Jack and Mildred Hurley shake off their sentimental dreams of the beauty of farm life, and even Mary Hurley is tempted to go back to her bondage because the dream of her old father's honesty is shattered by the discovery that he is only a grasping incendiary. But here the intention is very different. Robert Emmet may have been an unsuccessful idealist, but the play implies that not all that is unsuccessful is ineffective. The dreamers have their part to play in the world of practical affairs: it is only because they reach out towards a high, and apparently unattainable, ideal that their successors following the baffled pioneers are able to make the dream actual. In his preface to the printed play Mr. Robinson has explained himself with perfect clarity. "Dreams," he says, "are the only permanent things in life, the only heritage that can be hoarded or spent and yet handed down intact from generation to generation. Robert Emmet's dream came down to him through—how many?—generations. He passed it on undimmed. It is being dreamed to-day, as vivid as ever and—they say—as unpractical." Those words were written, or at least published, in 1915. To-day they have taken on a meaning which the writer himself could scarcely have foreseen when he wrote them.

It would seem as if Mr. Robinson's art had become sweetened by the dream which was capturing the mind of Ireland during the early days of the Great War. For several years Sinn Fein had been at work and even the scep-

tical were being fired with a hope that had withered in many breasts. It has proved to be a flame which has burnt up ardent hearts since 1915, but at least it gave a glow of warmth to the human spirit, although it has blazed alas! all too fiercely. Is it too much to believe that it was that same fire that lent light and warmth to *The Dreamers*?

In the next year, 1916, was produced the deservedly successful comedy which is surely so far the high water-mark of Mr. Robinson's work—*The Whiteheaded Boy*. In this play he turned to comedy outright. The play is full of real human stuff and it reverberates with healthy laughter. The people are mean and ridiculous, but these qualities, though they may debase serious or tragic drama, may be fully justified in comedy. In fact without them comedy cannot be. Tragedy depends on enlarging the spirit by its depiction of the grandness of the human soul. It may be through evil and weakness, but in the end goodness and the greatness of man must be vindicated, though only after the fullness of sorrow for human failure has been tasted and its inevitable consequences have engulfed the participants. Consequently if the participants are mean or if there is no final enlargement of the spirit the drama fails as tragedy. Comedy, however, works in just the opposite way. We look on human folly and meanness, and experience pleasure from the sense of superiority which this sight inspires. Yet even here the dramatist must guard against acerbity. If he presents human nature in a despicable light he has failed. What means has he to vindicate man, to prevent his picture from demeaning man? He has laughter. Laughter effects in comedy a kind of katharsis. It is analogous on a lower plane to the purging tears of tragedy. Laughter prerequires this sense of superiority, but the laughter itself topples us off our pedestal and restores us to the common ground of humanity on which we move level with our fellow fools. Laughter is a bond of fellowship scarcely less strong than tears. It serves through comedy to stir sympathy and to cleanse the spirit, and ultimately to vindicate human nature. Humour is somewhat different in its operation. We laugh

at the comic character of Malvolio, but we laugh with the humorous character Falstaff. Humour does not depend on the same sense of superiority, but like comedy it provides the purifying element of laughter.

In *The Whiteheaded Boy* Mr. Robinson has shown a far closer observation of human nature in general and Irish life in particular, and a much deeper sympathy, than in any of his earlier plays. *The Dreamers* does not lack sympathy, but it lacks actual human stuff. That we find in *The Whiteheaded Boy* in abundance. The play is full of foolish but delightful people. We laugh at the characteristic weaknesses of the Irish peasant to which in other plays Mr. Robinson has given the appearance of meanness. Where we have despised now we laugh. The characterization of Aunt Ellen is splendidly successful: she is at once a hard-headed business woman and an unpractical follower of the latest fad, a confirmed old maid who falls a prey to the middle-aged ardour and wooing of John Duffy. The characterization is well balanced and all the *dramatis personæ* are alive.

On the whole it is remarkable that the Irish drama is weak on the comic side. It would be interesting to speculate on the relation of this fact on the one hand to the notoriously humorous character of the Irish and on the other to the political environment of the new school of drama. That is a tempting by-path which we must eschew. Suffice it to note that the best modern Irish drama has been mainly tragic. True, Synge wrote comedy which almost rivals his own tragedy, and Lady Gregory is certainly more memorable as a comic than a tragic writer. Another writer of comedy to whom we make no other reference is Mr. Boyle. Now an old man he wrote between the years 1905 and 1912 four comedies which are noteworthy. Technically they resemble English comedy of late Victorian times, and on the whole, despite their sense of fun and much truthful portraiture, they are scarcely of sufficient importance to warrant special study in a history of dramatic tendencies. Comedy is the weak side of the modern Irish drama, and if Mr. Robinson

will prosecute the line he has opened up with *The Whiteheaded Boy* he will be doing valuable work which needs doing. Ireland has tears in plenty. She can do well with more laughter even in the theatre.

Mr. Robinson's next play was *The Lost Leader*, produced in Dublin in 1918. In certain respects it is the most arresting that he has written, but the qualities which make it interesting are not the qualities which necessarily make great drama. It turns largely on a sensational journalistic *coup*, and the play itself is undoubtedly sensational. The plot is based on the belief, said to persist in peasant Ireland, that Parnell still lives. It is the old story of the immortalization of the hero. In the play we meet an old man, half hotel-keeper, half gillie, buried in a remote recess of western Ireland. The hotel is visited by an up-to-date psychiatrist and an equally up-to-date journalist. After a preliminary chat on the modern psychological theories of repression and the unconscious between the doctor and the journalist, and vague hints that there is something strange about old Lucius Lenihan, we witness the exciting discovery through hypnosis that Lucius is really Charles Stewart Parnell. The dramatist works the scene very skilfully and at the end we are only three parts persuaded. He purposely reserves one part as mystery. There is a clear possibility that Mary Lenihan is right, as she obviously believes she is. She maintains that Lucius is her uncle who was formerly mad, suffering from a delusion that he was Parnell, but that he was cured by the knowledge that Parnell had died. For twenty-four years he had been living at home, quiet and reserved, but sane. That was the story her father had told her, and she believes it still despite the asseveration of Lucius that he is Parnell and that now at length, in 1917, he hears the clear call of duty to offer himself as a leader of his distracted country.

The half-comic squabbling of the political leaders of this remote village—the Unionist Major, the secretary of the Irish League and the local representative of Sinn Fein—is not very convincing as comedy ; nor does it wholly succeed as a symbol of Ireland's internal strife. Still less convincing is

the somewhat obvious theatrical device of delay, by which Lucius postpones the proof of his identity. A mingled gathering of the credulous and the incredulous waits on him at the hotel. After a good deal of rather irrelevant comedy they are put off by Lucius, who promises to meet them on the mountain top at sunset and there to demonstrate that he is Parnell. We are shown this quite improbable but sensational gathering. The witnesses who will prove his statement are late in arriving and the rest pass the time in further political quarrelling, whilst Lucius expresses the lofty ideals of fraternity and reconciliation which he sees, and Mr. Robinson sees, to be the only source of Ireland's salvation. The end is characteristically ironic. Thomas Houlihan, the old blind vagrant, fervently believes that Lucius is the Lost Leader. He quarrels fiercely with Long John Flavin, who stands for all that is corrupt in Irish life and politics. He is so violently infuriated by Long John that he attacks him with a hurley that he happens to have in his hand. In his blindness he aims untruly and kills Lucius. Too late the identification witnesses arrive. They knew Parnell and they confess a strong resemblance in the features of the dead man. It might be he ; they cannot be quite sure : in the end we are almost persuaded, but the veil of mystery is not completely lifted.

The play is unquestionably interesting, but its interest depends more on incident than on character. Lucius is subtly portrayed, but the rest do not stand out as dramatic creations. Several characters are quite distinct, but they are stock figures : the most lively portrait is that of Smith, the half anglicized, half americanized, Irish-born journalist, to whom the whole affair is merely first-class copy which he exploits to the utmost capacity of the single line and the one telegraphist by whose means he can maintain communication with the civilized, newspaper-reading world. Mr. Robinson seems to have been uncertain of his dramatic motive, with the result that the play is not successful as tragedy, comedy or tragicomedy. The history of drama shows in how many ways tragedy and comedy may be

successfully mingled and alternated, but it also shows that the dramatist must be clear as to his ultimate motive.

There are the makings of the tragic protagonist in Lucius Lenihan, though they are not fully exploited; and his death, though dramatically convenient, and necessary, is not happily contrived. It is accidental and not inevitable. It might be urged that the inevitability springs from the tragic dissension of parties in Ireland and that any leader must fall a prey to that strife. More recent history would support such a contention too lamentably. But we are not convinced by the play that the Leader's death proceeds from such a cause. What obtrudes itself before our eyes is this strife, at first ludicrous, then terrible, developing into physical violence; then an accidental blow, aimed by a blind man against one who deserves it but falling on Lucius Lenihan. On the symbolical plane it may be justified as truly tragic: Ireland's strife inevitably destroys her Lost Leader. In the play, however, the contrivance impresses us as being accidental, and to that extent the tragedy loses force. But like most of Mr. Robinson's plays *The Lost Leader* is interesting and it maintains and even enhances the promise which he has already given of making a valuable contribution to Irish drama. It strengthens the impression that as his art develops he is getting beyond mere thesis; that a broader, more sympathetic outlook on humanity is replacing the cynicism of his earlier work; and that he is less concerned with realism of form than with a real presentation of the human heart.

CHAPTER XVI

MORE IRISH DRAMATISTS

1. MURRAY

Mr. T. C. Murray is one of the most trenchant realists of the Irish school. Following the tradition of Synge he displays the life and character of the southern Irish peasant with a truthfulness that borders on brutality. Yet with all his grimness he avoids the sarcastic and ironic quality which has been noted in Mr. Robinson's early work. The bitterest, but not the grimmest of his plays, was his first—*The Wheel o' Fortune*, produced in Cork in 1909 and later revised and performed at the Abbey Theatre in 1913 under the title of *Sovereign Love*. It depicts shameless trafficking in sons and daughters, and sordid marriage schemes dependent merely on patrimonies and dowries. There is haggling even over the marriage fee, and the priest, Father McCarthy, is reported as having an amiable habit of charging as his fee five per cent. on the fortune. It is notorious that the hard struggle against circumstance which constitutes the life of many of the Irish peasants and small farmers has bred a sordid, brutal outlook on life. Certain dramatists, disgusted by the flabby sentimentalism of those who depicted Irish life as nobly aspirant and decked with all the graces of the spirit, reacted violently in an opposite direction. The result has been the marked tendency of some writers to emphasize, perhaps to emphasize unduly, the mercenary and brutal coarseness that they observed. Synge began it, but he was so fine an artist that his work, though moulded

of the clay, is not befouled by the mire. His followers have not always been so fortunate, as Mr. Murray shows in some of his work.

Another play which may be placed alongside this first one-act comedy is a short tragedy, *Spring*. It shows us an aged man, Andreesh, maltreated by his grasping daughter-in-law. Jude is a hardened, embittered woman, whose spirit is parched by the hard struggle against poverty. The ironic title of the play is justified by the spirit of spring and joy which still lives in the old man's heart. Mr. Murray is successful in expressing a sense of spring. The song of the lark, the frisking of lambs, the mirth of children sound the note of spring-time jollity. Even in the old man's heart it flowers. But it serves only to emphasize the cruelty of Jude in forcing him to the workhouse. Just as he is about to go the news comes that the Old Age Pensions Act has been passed. Now the happy grandfather can stay on with his son. Jude, although she is half ashamed of her former behaviour, is now ready enough to keep him. Five shillings a week will be a useful increment to the household exchequer. Then suddenly fate steps in and the old man has a stroke and dies. For Jude this is a double misfortune: she will have no chance of fingering the pension, and she will have to pay for the funeral and wake. We need not dwell on the construction, which is weak, so that the plot is awkward and unconvincing. What is noteworthy is the harsh spirit which broods over this realistic picture. The suggestion of spring is not sufficient to lighten the darkness.

Mr. Murray has written other short plays, but his most notable work consists of two longer tragedies, *Birthright* (1910) and *Maurice Harte* (1912). Both are intensely realistic and they betray something of the frank, even harsh, honesty which inspires the shorter plays just mentioned. But they are fuller and mellower pictures, revealing a deeper humanity than is to be seen on the rough surface of peasant life. In both the motive depends to some extent on the grim attachment of the labourer to the land which he not only possesses in virtue of legal sanction but which he has

incorporated with his own being by toil and sweat expended in the fight to conquer nature. The title of the former play implies the value which a man sets upon his birthright. When Hugh Morrissey learns that he is to be disinherited and that the little farm is to pass to his younger brother, Shane, he is stirred to the depths of his nature. His usual easy-going and charming manner gives place to an unexpected ferocity. We are surprised by his deep resentment of what seems to him so cruelly unjust, for we had scarcely realized that he was sufficiently diligent to be deeply attached to the soil on which he was reared. Yet we perceive real anguish in his expostulation to his hard father :

> Ever since I was a little child 'twas told to me that this place would be mine—you told me so yourself.

In *Maurice Harte* we see the painful wrench it is for Mrs. Harte to hand the farm to her son and to allow his bride to take over the reins of management ; but this very natural human feeling is but a slight element in the play. What is rather more noticeable is the spirit of barter and the material interest which are aroused by Owen's marriage. When the tragedy of Maurice's failure to become a priest is inevitable, the mother seems largely concerned by the financial consequences. Now Bride Burke will refuse to marry Owen, with the result that her dowry will not be forthcoming to pay the debts which load the farm so heavily.

Despite this ironic element both plays claim consideration, especially *Birthright*, which holds a very high place in the Irish drama. It is a dark tragedy of violent passion. Bat Morrissey is a hard tyrant, bullying his gentle wife and hating his eldest son, Hugh. Hugh is a sportsman, the leader of youth, the trusted favourite of the priest ; but his concentration on farm work falls below that of his duller, conscientious brother Shane. The farm cannot support two sons, so Shane is setting out for America. Circumstances all work together to heighten Bat's resentment. Just when he is wanted at home Hugh is playing a hurley match and must spend the evening at a team supper at the special

request of Father Daly. Such a request cannot be refused and he goes with the consent of his distraught mother who fears her husband's resentment but realizes that circumstances force Hugh to go. The afternoon match had been won through the prowess of Hugh, and the boys had accompanied him home with triumphant music and shouting. The noise frightened the horse which had consequently run loose and broken its leg, with the result that it had to be shot. This misfortune, coming on the top of everything, drives Bat to insensate rage and he attributes all his misfortunes to Hugh's worthlessness. He decides to disinherit Hugh, and tearing the label from Shane's trunk he makes Shane rewrite it with Hugh's name as the emigrant destined to leave home in three days for America.

One more unfortunate circumstance completes the ruin. Bat and Shane are kept up through the night attending to a farrowing sow, but Hugh is detained at the supper from which he had promised to return early. He is perfectly blameless. The visiting team had become rowdy with drink, and being the home captain and entrusted with the conduct of affairs by Father Daly he could not leave until the guests had been with difficulty despatched after midnight. He returns home tired out. His father, himself tired and fretted, greets him with violent anger and flings at him the news that he is disinherited and will have to go to America. Hugh, alone with his grief, sees that the label bearing his name has been altered in Shane's handwriting. He flings accusations against his brother, who is quite innocent; but the inference is one for which Hugh can scarcely be blamed. He calls his brother a mean, treacherous grabber. Shane, angered by this injustice, accuses Hugh, with equal injustice, of being drunk. The springs of Shane's nature are broken and a torrent of fury bursts forth. Shane the simple, quiet, steady youth accuses his mother of persistent favouritism towards Hugh. Hugh had always had the best clothes; Hugh had always had the treats from earliest childhood. Suddenly a hidden and perhaps unfelt sore is exposed. Angered still more by these bitter accusations against his

gentle mother Hugh flames out with still greater fury. The brothers fight. In vain Maura tries to part them. They are possessed with rage that can be expressed only in brutal blows. Shane seizes a hurley and fells his brother with a fatal blow.

It is a dark tale of passion across which the lurid flash of bestial rage throws a fitful glare. If it were that alone it might have the attraction which some audiences can find in a story of sensational crime, but it would not be art. But it is more. The great creation of the play is the character of the mother, Maura. Gentle and patient, this woman pervades the gloomy house with her tender love and self-effacing service. In a sense she is the most tragic figure in the play; she is certainly the most pathetic. Hugh dies, Bat is hard enough to recover from the blow, Shane must pay the penalty of passionate crime, but it is the tender Maura who will wend slowly to her grave bearing the weight of sorrow in her soul.

The play is remarkable for its swift progress. The scene opens with a natural ease and the dramatist quickly puts us in sufficient possession of the circumstances and creates his atmosphere with great skill. Both acts take place in the same room, the time extends over only a few hours, and the events march with terrible but even tread. A question which arises in the mind is how far they move inevitably. It may be urged that given two temperaments like those of Bat Morrissey and his son Hugh the issue must be dire. Each has qualities of greatness: the father though fierce is strong and an indomitable worker; Hugh is temperate, athletic, socially popular, careful and affectionate towards his mother, and, so far as we can judge, unjustly accused by his father of laziness. It is one of those cases of a father and son so different that each can recognize only the faults of the other, but their natures are such as to make it impossible for the fires of resentment merely to smoulder without flame.

Still, we ask, is the tragedy inevitable? The death of the mare is accidental. It is an accident that Hugh should

be kept out late on that particular night, the night when Bat is obliged to stay out of bed in an already bad temper. It is an accident that Hugh should misinterpret Shane's handwriting on the label. On the other hand it may be true that between such characters as those of Bat and Hugh the clash must come, that if it were not these accidents it would be others that would cause the crash. Nevertheless one cannot but feel that the concatenation of accidents is improbable. Yet if they are improbable they are manipulated with such skill that they do not seem unnatural.

A more serious criticism is the twist which is given to the plot to achieve the dénouement, with the consequent effect of obscuring the causes of the tragedy. We have seen that the play depends on the conflict between father and son, with the tearing asunder of the heart of Maura who preserves to the end her duty and affection as mother and wife. If this conflict had ended in mortal fight between the father and the son it might have been impossibly brutal, but it would have been logical. The dramatist, perhaps rightly, avoided this conclusion. He must therefore divert the conflict so that the two brothers are finally opposed. So he must introduce the episode of the label : and this he manages with notable skill. Shane does not take much part in the beginning of the play and we feel no particular interest in him. He is a steady, dull youth who is going to emigrate. We know, and want to know, no more. In order to justify the fight which is needed for the tragic climax Mr. Murray, just before the end, reveals the hidden depths of his envious nature and surprises us by showing that Maura is not the perfect mother we thought. This gives a serious wrench to the imagination. By introducing at the eleventh hour these new elements the dramatist forces us hastily to readjust our outlook. In effect the result may not be as serious as it sounds, but it is a real blemish on an otherwise finely conceived and skilfully executed play.

Maura it is who makes the play wonderful and poignant. *Maurice Harte* also depends for its beauty largely on the mother and son theme. Maurice is the pride of the family

for whom every sacrifice possible has been made in order that the promising lad may be educated as a priest. The farm has been burdened with debt to pay the heavy expenses involved, but the end is now in sight. A few months and he will be ordained and one of his first offices will be to marry his brother Owen to Bride Burke. The old couple will then resign the place to Owen and the dowry will be used to pay off the debts. It was indeed a lucky match for the Hartes, but with a priest in the family they might well fly high. The play is opened with the same skilful unfolding as we have noted in *Birthright*. The devices are similar but similarly successful. We see Ellen Harte's efficient housewifery, her maternal pride and her devotion to her beloved Maurice. Into this happy scene bursts the terrible news that Maurice has no vocation: he cannot become a priest. In vain Father Mangan argues with him: his mother's agony of disappointment cannot shake his resolve. But in the end her vehemence triumphs and he is persuaded to go back and accept ordination. The sigh of relief and joy that is uttered by his parents and his brother serves to throw into hard relief the desolate anguish of his tortured soul.

Nine months pass and Maurice has won the highest place in his final examination. He is about to be ordained and then he will come home for his brother's wedding. Everyone is expectant. All hopes are fixed on these two great family events. But their happiness is to be blasted. The strain has been too great for Maurice. His sensitive, honest spirit has writhed in agony under a superficial resolve to carry out his promise. Inwardly he has known that he was doing wrong and his mind has given way under the stress. The object of her love and her hope is led back to Ellen Harte a madman. This terrible ending is handled with restraint, so that the effect is wonderfully poignant and in no way repulsive.

It cannot be said that the sequence of events is improbable. One submits to a sense of the inevitable and to that extent the tragedy is more compelling than in *Birthright*. But in other respects the play compares unfavourably with its

predecessor. The chief weakness is a lack of unity. Structural unity is the notable strength of *Birthright*, despite the slight confusion of motive. In *Maurice Harte* the climax of the first act is very effective but it tends to dwarf the rest of the play. The beauty of Maura's character elevates *Birthright*, but Ellen Harte's love is so strongly infused with selfishness that from it springs the whole of the tragedy. Like Mrs. Clancy she feels her son's misfortune not for his sake but for her own. It is the shattering of her hopes of having her son a priest that occupies her emotions. Under the stress of disappointment she betrays the baser elements of that hope. If her son fails her the family credit will be destroyed and the blow will have serious financial reactions. Owen may be forgiven for his desolate cry when the final blow falls : " She'll never come into this house now." For him the loss of Bride Burke is a catastrophe that commands all sympathy, but with Mrs. Harte it is primarily the loss of a dowry that occupies her and we are impressed by her meanness. Incidentally it is not very clear why this misfortune should necessarily spoil the match ; and if it does, Bride Burke is scarcely much loss.

Maurice Harte, despite its looser construction, is a more logical play than *Birthright*. It excels in probability, whilst *Birthright* has the greater intensity and swiftness. They are both extremely interesting and powerful plays, and each of them is a notable contribution to Irish drama. They are written by a man who obviously knows the life and character which he depicts. The dialogue, close to reality, has dramatic strength and fitness. If they fall short of being in the first rank of tragedy they are not without great qualities.

2. ERVINE

We have seen that a few of the Irish dramatists whom we have studied were influenced by foreign models and methods : Mr. Martyn owed much to Ibsen ; Mr. Robinson shows a realistic tendency which seems to be less a result of Synge's influence than a repercussion of the spirit of the English

school of bourgeois naturalism. In Mr. Ervine's work we find another example of the interaction of English and Irish drama. His work, where it is uninfluenced by English method, is further interesting as springing not from the people and spirit of southern Ireland but from the life and culture of Ulster. Another Ulsterman, Mr. Rutherford Mayne, had begun to interpret the life of northern Ireland dramatically, but it is Mr. Ervine who has given us the fullest pictures of the character and spirit of Ulster. Mr. Ervine reflects more clearly than any dramatist the double influence of Irish and English traditions. His work shows great diversity: some plays are intensely Irish; others belong unequivocally to the school of Stanley Houghton and Miss Elizabeth Baker.

He began his dramatic work somewhat inauspiciously with *The Magnanimous Lover*, a short, grim study of the weaknesses of a narrow, harsh religion. Inspired by the same spirit of revolt against hypocrisy, which may be mingled with a glib profession of piety, as stimulated English dramatists from Mr. H. A. Jones onwards, Mr. Ervine depicts in Henry Hinde, a successful shopkeeper, the worst side of voluble protestantism. It is Irish in setting and speech. The scene is laid in a village of Ulster and most of the characters are plain protestant peasants. It is, however, noteworthy that in order to embody the quality of religious hypocrisy Mr. Ervine has had recourse to a semi-anglicized type in Henry Hinde. He springs from an Ulster, protestant milieu, but he clothed himself with the trappings of English nonconformity and the spirit of a successful English shopkeeper. The theme, the characters and the dialogue are stilted and conventional, and except in so far as the play indicates Mr. Ervine's early bent it may be dismissed from a general estimate of his work.[1]

His first considerable play was *Mixed Marriage* (1911), a tragedy in four acts. In *The Magnanimous Lover* Mr. Ervine had ranged himself with the English writers of the

[1] *The Magnanimous Lover* was produced in 1912, after *Mixed Marriage*, but the author has stated that it was written some years before that play.

drama of ideas. He had dealt with a variation of the theme that Hankin had introduced into *The Last of the De Mullins* and that Houghton was to re-emphasize in *Hindle Wakes*—the refusal of a girl to accept the convention that marriage necessarily rights a wronged woman. In *Mixed Marriage* Mr. Ervine is still concerned with the drama of ideas, and rarely does he shake himself free of the trammels with which this genre is apt to burden a dramatist. At the same time the thesis does not overweight the play as a whole, though it tends to lengthen the third act to the extent of over-straining the attention and thus weakening the dramatic effect.

In this play Mr. Ervine chose a setting with which he has shown himself to be intimately conversant and which he handles with the skill which springs from sympathy as well as knowledge. The acerbity of his earlier play gives place to a fine humanism. The character of Mrs. Rainey is nobly conceived and portrayed with fullness of heart and a cunning hand. She embodies all the motherly qualities that Mr. Murray has depicted, and her inexhaustible store of wit and commonsense, blended with a charming sense of humour, makes her the mainstay of her distressful family. Always ready with her simple wisdom, which springs from a high though homespun philosophy, she may be relied on to say or do the right thing in any emergency. Tactful, patient and infinitely loving she conquers all. She is a very great creation.

Mr. Ervine is as well able to construct men as women characters. If he can create a gentle, humane creature such as Mrs. Rainey, he can also depict the hard, bigoted Ulster-man, stark in his religion to the degree of unyielding severity, but yet with qualities that win if not sympathy at least respect and pity. Such a one is John Rainey. A strong Orangeman, he is with difficulty persuaded to throw his weight into a strike movement in order to counteract the efforts of the other side, who are propagating the idea that the strike is the nefarious work of Catholics and Nationalists. He is sufficiently broad-minded, under the mollifying influence

of his wife, to accept the arguments of Michael O'Hara, a Catholic who is fervently anxious to quell the bigotry which works such harm to Ireland. As Michael says:

> Her's a chance t'kill bigotry and make the men o' Bilfast realise that onderneath the Cathlik an' the Prodesan there's the plain workin' man.

Rainey is willing to seize the chance and he goes to speak in favour of the solidarity of Protestant and Catholic.

When he learns that his son, Hugh, is determined to marry Nora Murray the old prejudice flames up. She is a "Papish," and to a mixed marriage he will never consent. His son is expelled from home. They were right who said the strike was all a papist plot: has he not evidence of it in his own home? He refuses to support the strike any longer. If Hugh would give up Nora he might relent. Michael O'Hara obsessed with a passionate desire for religious reconciliation, implores the lovers to make the sacrifice; but they refuse. The smouldering fire breaks out with former fury and Belfast is in the throes of religious strife. Riot, police, soldiers follow with inevitable precision. We hear the noise and alarum of civil broil surging outside the Raineys' house, but still the old man is unrelenting, obstinately sure that what he has done was right. The door is unlocked in the hope of rescuing Michael from the infuriated mob of rival factions, and Nora, distraught with fear and overwhelmed by the thought that her refusal to give up Hugh is the cause of all the trouble, goes out with the wild hope of quelling the storm. The soldiers fire and a bullet kills her.

In addition to John and Mrs. Rainey the characterization is distinct and strong throughout. The old couple stand out with greatest emphasis, but the rest are all adequately portrayed. The relationship of the sons, Hugh and Tom, to their father forms a second, parallel motive in the thesis of the play. Rainey is not merely a bigoted Orangeman; he is also a stern parent. His sons regard him as a bully. He considers that he is only firm and that his severity is for their good. We, and Mrs. Rainey, are inclined to accept the sons' view. Rainey's relationship with his family is in

keeping with his general mental make-up; so that the father-and-son motive, which smacks so strongly of the contemporary English drama, does not seem to be an unnatural complication of the theme. Hugh and Tom have suffered paternal tyranny long enough, but the moment has come for revolt. The reason for Hugh's new-found independence is clear: love urges him into taking his stand. He is an easy-going, affectionate lad; but he finds himself when his father withholds consent to his marriage with Nora. Tom is younger, but he too, for reasons less obvious, refuses to submit to further oppression. His declaration of independence is not incredible, but it does not proceed from the circumstances so easily and simply as Hugh's. In thus isolating the hard old man the dramatist is following a right instinct for effect. The curtain falls finally on John Rainey, with Nora lying dead at his feet, and with his sons by him, Hugh broken by the loss of his love, Tom with his heart full of black resentment.

The play is made of the real stuff of tragedy: the human material is adequate. John Rainey is a great figure. Despite his hardness and blind bigotry he commands respect. His faults and his merits are inextricably interwoven: they are perhaps the necessary complement of each other. The steadfast love of Mrs. Rainey, perfect mother and perfect wife, evoking what is best in her husband and in her sons, preserves our faith in human nature. She knows when to touch the gloom of bitter feeling with a sparkle of fun: she sees the moment when she must lavish all her gentle womanhood. At the appropriate time she could administer rebuke to her husband for his unbending rigidity; but when at last he draws himself up to the height of his spiritual pride, untaught by the terrible catastrophe, she sees that remonstrance is vain, that only gentle sympathy will serve.

> *Rainey* (*as if dreaming*). A wus right. A know A was riht.
> *Mrs. Rainey* (*weeping a little, and patting him gently*). Aw, my poor man, my poor man.

So the play ends and we are left finally with a feeling of the exquisite goodness of this grand woman.

If the human stuff is adequate for tragedy, the manipulation of events is less fortunate. It may be argued that given the circumstances of strife, which proceed inevitably from the doggedness of John Rainey, disaster must surely ensue. What is not inevitable is the particular disaster—the death of Nora. We are not convinced that it was necessary for Nora to go out at the precise moment when she did: in fact it is on the contrary improbable. It is certainly a natural and unfortunately a probable event, the loss of life in a Belfast religious riot. It is stated that this particular episode is founded on an incident which actually took place. This does not affect the issue. We are here concerned not with actuality, but with art. The artist must not merely reproduce life: he must sort and select his material and present it as a logically constructed and self-contained unit. If tragedy is to be convincing the catastrophe must proceed inevitably from the tragic complication and this it does not do in this play.

Mr. Ervine's next play, *The Critics*, is an amusing, but slight, skit on the philistine character of the criticism inflicted on the Abbey Theatre. In his next considerable play, *Jane Clegg* (1913) he cut himself completely adrift from the Irish tradition. Although he was an Ulsterman and had written plays of Ulster life and people Mr. Ervine's plays had been acted at the Abbey Theatre, and he had carried on the work of Mr. Mayne in bringing Northern Ireland to the National Theatre in Dublin. But now he threw in his lot with English drama. *Jane Clegg* is in no respect Irish. The people are English, the play follows the prevailing English mode, and it was produced first in an English theatre.

This piece of unflinching realism belongs to the school of English drama which we have seen flourishing in the years before and up to 1914. Its setting recalls the soul-destroying banality of Miss Baker's work. Henry Clegg is an unredeemed and irredeemable scoundrel. Without an ounce of moral stamina he keeps a mistress whilst living with his wife and children. As he is a poorly paid commercial

traveller he has not the money to finance his vices, so he bets. Failing to trick his wife out of her little fortune of a few hundred pounds, which she is reserving jealously for the education of her children, he robs his employer to pay his betting losses and to emigrate with his lover. The theme is sufficiently sordid, but the circumstances of the play, the mean interior of the Cleggs' house, are depicted with such unrelenting truth as to make the picture disgusting and even unendurable.

Every sense of refinement is jarred as we hear the whining disobedience of the wretched, blameless children. Old Mrs. Clegg, the grandmother, sets the teeth on edge, not merely with her callous torture of the English language, but with her vulgar mind and her constant swinging from sentimental affection to querulous complaint. As if this were insufficient to show how mean human relations may be we must undergo the acquaintance of Mr. Munce, a little rat of a bookie, a bully and a swindler by turns, cringing at one moment and, when he feels his power, threatening to expose the miserable Clegg. Yet from this human muck heap, not unsullied, but still essentially unspoiled, rises Jane Clegg. Strong-willed without being unsympathetically harsh she will fight for her children and will undergo much to maintain family concord. Her finer qualities have not had the chance of full development, and she seems to brook without much difficulty her nauseating old mother-in-law, and to be almost content with the narrow horizon of her life. She has forgiven one act of faithlessness in her husband and she bears with little complaint the idiotic spoiling of the children by their grandmother. She seems to move half-numbed, her finer instincts dulled by her environment, but quite determined to save her children in the end. When she learns bit by bit the extent of her husband's lying and crime and meanness she quietly pays his debts, which will absorb a quarter of her little stock of money, and bids him go. The end is quiet and restrained. The children are in bed, the helpless old woman has been dismissed, and husband and wife are alone. The atmosphere is tense but frozen. The flabby,

soulless man is a mere puppet in the hands of this self-possessed, strong-willed woman. As she bids him leave the house—not to-morrow, but to-night—she towers in her quiet strength.

The play is full of powerful dramatic situations, of which this is the last and greatest. The characters give scope for acting. A great actress has realized the opportunity for displaying power and restraint in the person of Jane Clegg. Jane is undoubtedly a great figure, but the rest of the important characters are so ignoble and their environment and behaviour are so mean that the spirit suffers contraction from intercourse with them. Not even the patient endurance and quiet power of Jane are sufficient to save the play from being intolerable.

In 1913 Mr. Ervine returned to the theme he had handled with such success in *Mixed Marriage*. *The Orangeman* is a one-act play dealing again with the bitterness of political and religious feeling in Belfast. It is a very slight piece which adds nothing to Mr. Ervine's reputation, unless it be that this fresh excursion into the field with which he was familiar spurred him to go still further and write *John Ferguson*. This tragedy, as great as anything that Mr. Ervine has done, appeared in 1915.

Once again he depicts in John Ferguson the rigid protestantism of Ulster. He shows us a man feeble in bodily health, sympathetic and affectionate in his family relations, but indomitable in his religious faith. His little world topples and crashes about him, but the faith that is in him, with but one momentary flicker, burns clear to the end. It is the mother, Sarah Ferguson, whose love and sympathy are unable to bear the stress of tragic circumstance. Like Mrs. Cather, in *The Magnanimous Lover*, she rounds on her daughter when she finally refuses to marry the man she cannot love.

John Ferguson is held in the brutal grip of Henry Witherow, a cruel tyrant, the well-to-do miller to whom Ferguson's farm is mortgaged. Ferguson is sick and the farm depends on his son Andrew, a lad unfitted by tempera-

ment and physique to be a successful agriculturist. Witherow will foreclose, and the last hope is dashed when the post arrives but no money comes from Ferguson's brother in America. Then another hope flowers for a moment. James Caesar, the grocer, a mean, skulking little creature, is so anxious to win Hannah Ferguson and at the same time so desirous of scoring off Witherow, whom he loathes with a virulent hatred, that he offers to pay off the mortgage if Hannah will marry him. It is a perilous temptation to old John. He loves his daughter tenderly, but his terror of being driven from home overcomes him. He does not attempt to persuade Hannah into accepting Caesar, but he knows her reluctance and he does nothing to make it possible for her to refuse. She feels that only she can save her father, and he allows her to sacrifice herself. Reaction follows and Hannah realizes the impossibility of marrying the man she utterly despises. Her mother would force her into keeping her word, but John sees his mistake and with tender solicitude for his daughter he silences his wife and sends word to Witherow that he may foreclose.

Blow after blow now rains on John Ferguson. Witherow rapes his daughter. James Caesar, infuriated by this act of brutal lust, swears he will murder Witherow and goes out to seek his enemy. John Ferguson, inspired to forgiveness by his religion, after vainly reasoning with Caesar, implores his son Andrew to go out and stop the crime. But Andrew will do nothing of the kind : he hopes Caesar will avenge Hannah. So the sick man goes out himself into the night to save not Witherow from death but James Caesar from damnation. But in vain : he cannot find him. Next morning Caesar comes in bedraggled after a night of cowering terror which he has spent beneath a bush. He had gone to commit the murder, but he had been too much of a poltroon to do the deed. He scared his own wits away by accidentally firing the gun when he was in a wood and he had lain in hiding till morning. Now he demeans himself to the lowest depths. He seems to take a morbid pleasure in treading himself into the dirt. He bewails his pusillanimity, yet proclaims his

shame. "I'm full of hate," he whimpers, "and I want to hurt them that hurts me, but I haven't the courage to do it."

The scene is violently disturbed by the news that Witherow has been found shot. James Caesar's terror knows no limit. He asserts with all the earnestness he can command that he is guiltless. But circumstances are too much against him. His hatred of Witherow is well known: often he has threatened to take his life and recent events make it impossible to believe his asseverations of innocence. He is arrested. Now at last Hannah respects the miserable wretch. He has won her esteem by his courageous deed of vengeance, and she visits him in prison whenever she may. His fate is sealed, and Hannah has received a hurt which is well-nigh incurable, but it seems as if at length a peaceful end is ensured for the failing old man. A letter arrives from his brother with the money needed to save the old place. A postscript tells that he had intended catching the previous mail, but he had mistaken the date and just missed it by a day.

This horrible cruelty of fate wrecks Hannah's faith in providence. The mail missed by one day! What had it not meant! Her life ruined; her father's days shortened; Witherow murdered; Caesar indubitably bound to pay the penalty with his life. "Where's the right in it, da? Where's the right in it? It's not just! It's not fair!" she cries out in her anguish. But still John Ferguson remains safe on the rock of his faith:

> We can't understand everything. It's no good trying to puzzle it all out. We must just have faith . . . that's all! Just have faith!

The waves of doubt may shake his foothold; but he is secure. The powers of evil may marshal all their ranks against him, but like Job he can resist them through the strength of his belief and trust in God.

Then falls the last blow, and the greatest. Andrew, unable any longer to bear the burden of a shamed conscience, confesses that he was the murderer. Instinctively he had known that James Caesar would never have the pluck to

satisfy his hatred by crime, so he had stolen out and murdered the ravisher of his sister himself. He has no remorse for having done the deed, but he cannot bear the thought that the innocent man should suffer in his place. All the instinct to preserve his son rises and overpowers the old man. He implores Andrew to escape. But Andrew will not. He must go to the police and confess. " I must go, ma, for my peace' sake." His mother cannot understand him : her anger rises against Hannah who appreciating his feeling will not join in dissuading him. For a moment the distraught father had seemed to be losing his foothold ; but now his faith is once again established. He can understand, he can sympathize.

> *Andrew Ferguson.* Eating the heart out of me, it is. Gnawing and gnawing ! . . . I never get the picture of Jimmy out of my mind ! I run for miles this morning to try and tire myself out so's I could sleep and rest myself, but I can't get content nohow. That's the way of it, ma. You understand me, da, don't you ?
>
> *John Ferguson.* Ay, son, I understand you.

He realizes that his son is right. He repents of his weakness in wanting him to evade justice. But his sorrow is not less bitter. His only son, the son of his pride and his hope ! Can he let him go, pleads the distraught mother.

> *John Ferguson.* I did take pride in him, but I take no pride in anything now. I must have sinned bitterly against God to be punished this way. It must have been something I done that's brought calamity on us. I'd be willing to pay whatever price was demanded of me . . . but Andrew ! . . .
>
> *Andrew Ferguson.* Da, a man must clean himself, mustn't he ?
>
> *John Ferguson.* Ay. Ay, son !

Their son leaves them. Hannah accompanies him on his awful errand.

The scene closes on the broken couple. Hand in hand they sit, companions in their anguish. John Ferguson's faith is still unvanquished. He opens the Bible and reads to his wife. He continues where he had been reading before the terrible news had come to crush him. But he cannot. " O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom ! Would

God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son. . . . my son." He cannot. *" His voice ends in a sob. The Bible falls from his hands on to his lap. He sits staring into the fire. There is a low moan from his wife."*

In John Ferguson Mr. Ervine has created a character worthy to stand by Mrs. Rainey. With sympathetic insight into the stern religious type of the Ulster protestant he has distilled from it all that is noblest and most worthy. In his other plays he has demonstrated that he is not unduly biased and that he can recognize the blindness and the constriction of mind and spirit which this narrow religion may produce and the terrible political consequences to which it too often gives rise. Here he has shown the other side. John Ferguson may be narrow, his belief may seem blind to the verge of fatalism ; but the dramatist has depicted faith as something by which a man can live well and die well, a spur to right action and an unfailing support in the dark valley of grief, verily the rod and the staff of divine comfort.

The character of John Ferguson is so commanding and the ending of the play is so impressive that criticism is almost silenced. Nevertheless on reflection one is conscious of certain respects in which the play seems to fall short. The rape of Hannah by Witherow is somewhat improbable in its circumstances and at best a rather cheap device of melodrama. Witherow himself is a somewhat stagey villain. The character of James Caesar is cleverly contrived and interesting, but one feels that, although it is an integral and necessary part of the plot as it stands, it sorts somewhat ill with the rest of the play, and tends to demean the tragedy and at times to bring it down to a level little above the ridiculous. These are minor, though perhaps not negligible criticisms, which may seem captious. They do not, however, touch the greatness of the character of John Ferguson which is the foundation on which the play rests.

A more interesting point to note is the use which the dramatist makes of fate. He seems as unrelenting as a writer of Greek tragedy as he pours out the vials of wrath on the unoffending head of his protagonist. If this is a

tragedy of conflict, the conflict is in the breast of John Ferguson. Beset by destroying circumstance, one blow following another in quick succession, the old Christian staggers and sways as he does battle to maintain the stronghold of his faith. In a sense it is a conflict between John Ferguson and the forces of fate ; in a higher sense it is a struggle between faith and doubt. The end is not tragic in the ordinary fashion. A woman has been violated, a man has been murdered, an only son goes out to a felon's death : but these do not make the tragedy. The real ending of the tragedy is the figure of John Ferguson broken physically by the blows of fate. Although he does not die before the curtain falls, we rightly regard him as a dead man. Yet, in the spirit of true tragedy, the final note is not unalloyed pain. As in all great tragedy we feel at the end that human nature has been justified. The body may be broken, the flesh of man may perish, but nothing can destroy the invincible soul of man. Such a feeling expands the spirit of the onlooker, but it can never be conveyed when the figures of tragedy are themselves mean and petty. From the woes of little men the dramatist may extract pathos and win our pity, but they cannot elevate and reinforce. That is why great tragedy can be made only of great human character.

Lastly let us apply the test of inevitability. It may be urged, quite justly, that the tragedy depends on a trivial accident. Were it not for the fact that Uncle Andrew missed the mail the tragedy would have been averted. To assert that tragedy must flow inevitably does not mean that accident can play no part in setting the scene. What we call accident is naturally incidental to life. It is just to criticize *Mixed Marriage* for its accidental quality because the resultant effect is that the dénouement does not flow inevitably from the circumstances and characters as the dramatist has seen fit to arrange them. In preparing the circumstances of *John Ferguson* accident is one of the preliminary desiderata. Given a John Ferguson in a certain environment and beset by certain difficulties, the source of which is an accident, what will happen ? What happens

must happen : the dénouement is dramatically inevitable. The dramatist has persuaded us that it must happen ; therefore he has in this respect fulfilled a condition which tragedy demands.

Mr. Ervine's latest play, *The Ship* (1922), does not stand this test so satisfactorily. The plot proceeds naturally through the first and second acts. Jack Thurlow, ardent and full of warm ideals for the emancipation of man from the domination of a mechanical civilization, refuses to carry on his father's work. Mr. Thurlow, no less an enthusiast than his son, has expressed all his vigorous personality in ship-building. He has become master of the greatest shipyard of England : the " Magnificent," his latest creation, is an oil-driven super-liner which tops all records of ship construction. When the time comes for her maiden trip he is too ill to travel. He is bitterly disappointed, but he would be content if Jack took his place. It tore his heart to part with his son when Jack left the firm and took up the foolish fad of farming ; but it is more distressing still to contemplate the " Magnificent " taking the ocean and no Thurlow on board. At last Jack succumbs to his father's obstinate entreaties. He leaves his farm, although it is the season when it most needs his attention, and takes his father's place. The vessel strikes an iceberg in mid ocean and sinks. Jack refuses to leave the ship, for he knows that his father would never have abandoned her, and he is drowned. It is a double blow to the father. The ship which he believed unsinkable has betrayed his trust. Through his obstinacy his son went on the fatal voyage and has perished. We cannot but feel the accidental quality of the dénouement. We may believe that such a conflict of personalities as we are shown in father and son must end tragically, but the particular ending which the dramatist shows is such an irrelevant catastrophe that we are not deeply impressed.

In this play Mr. Ervine has once again abandoned the Ulster which he handles so well and taken his stand as a purely English dramatist. It may be that Belfast and its shipbuilding industry are not far from his mind in his choice

of theme, although there is definite implication that the play is not set in Ireland, and the language, characters and atmosphere are wholly English. The play shows Mr. Ervine again working the drama of ideas. There is a double thesis. The conflict between father and son is the old struggle of the younger generation to express itself despite the repression of parental authority. The conflict is deep rooted, but it does not show the violence and bitterness that make some of the English plays that we have considered so dour and terrible.

Writing ten years after Houghton and Miss Sowerby, Mr. Ervine brings the causes of conflict up-to-date. The play bears the marks of having been written since the Great War. Captain Cornelius shows signs of that cynicism and irresponsibility which have arisen from war weariness and the shattering of the fine ideals with which many a young man first threw himself into the struggle. Jack shows the influence of the Great War on a slightly younger generation. He did not endure the torments of Armageddon but his sensitive nature has taken the impress of the new tendencies of thought. The new revolt is a revolt against machinery. In the Victorian age there was an æsthetic revolt against the ugliness of the new machine-made world. The " back to the land " cry of the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth represented a craving to escape the ugliness of city life and a desire to recapture a purer relationship with nature and with life. Springing from the idealism of Morris and his disciples this tendency represented the desire to burst the repressive bonds of modern society and achieve self-expression of the personality on a simpler plane. Towns and factories choked the life out of men and women : but contact with mother earth, work that brought joy to the labourer, would surely give scope for the realization of what is best in man.

Every age has raised its cry of " Back to Nature," but each age interprets the ideal in its peculiar way. It warmed for a moment the vicious, over-civilized society of Alexandria in the idyllic songs of Sicilian simplicity that fell from the

lips of Theocritus. Virgil voiced the craving for prosaic Rome. The oppression of a too elaborate culture and a degenerate court was alleviated for the Italian of the Renaissance and for the satiated Elizabethan by the winds of Arcady to which they were carried by the pastoralism of a Sanazzaro or a Sir Philip Sidney. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Walt Whitman, William Morris and our modern promoters of garden cities all are fired by the same wish to escape from a contaminating civilization. To-day that secular desire is touched by a modern variation. For a century and more the sociologist has realized the defacing ugliness of those " dark satanic mills " ; they have seen the human degradation that has accompanied the building up of a machine-made social order. The Great War has forced into prominence the terrible truth that man has constructed a huge machine which he is hardly capable of controlling. Having barely escaped annihilation by the vast engine of destruction which his own mind and hand have created man is filled with a new terror. The ideal of a simpler life to-day is new in that it springs not merely from a desire to breathe fresh air and look upon clean earth, but also from a great fear that civilization may turn and destroy its maker.

This is the main idea underlying *The Ship*. Jack has the old catch-phrases about wanting to express himself and to live his own life. But there is a deeper significance in the play. The " Magnificent " is a marvel of mechanism. The man who has created her may well believe that he has conquered the sea. Even though he is mistaken and his floating palace is destroyed by a greater natural force, the issue is unaffected. Man has conquered many of the forces of nature. If John Thurlow has failed this time, he will succeed the next. The point is that in conquering nature man may be so undermining himself that though secure from nature he will fall a prey to the work of his own mind and hand. Mr. Ervine is not so callow as to suggest that therefore we should let mind and hand lie idle, or divert their use only to harmless pursuits. One believes that he holds rather that what man needs is not less but more civili-

zation; that the danger is not that man is civilized but that he is half civilized. His salvation can come only with a well-balanced stride of progress, so that the higher qualities of the human spirit keeping pace with the development of mechanical contrivance will enable man to control and not be controlled by his own handiwork.

It must not, however, be thought that Mr. Ervine is merely or primarily didactic. *The Ship* has a philosophical basis which we have attempted to expound and develop, but it is concerned mainly with men and women. The characters of John Thurlow and his son stand out as distinct and interesting. Cornelius is clearly depicted, but his portraiture shows signs of effort. By far the most striking character is old Mrs. Thurlow, Jack's grandmother. We see in her the hand that created Mrs. Rainey. Intensely sympathetic, with inexhaustible depths of plain wisdom, she is the good genius of the play. The dramatist hardly convinces us that an octogenarian can be quite so vital and effective as he makes Mrs. Thurlow. We cannot but revere the splendid old lady and admire her as a dramatic creation, but still we feel that she lacks the convincing reality of Mrs. Rainey. She is a trifle more stagey than the simple Belfast mother, and from the difference of their social environment she is necessarily somewhat more sophisticated.

It is not possible to form more than a provisional estimate of Mr. Ervine's work. He has shown himself to be a versatile writer. He has contributed to purely English drama as well as to Irish drama, but it is undoubtedly as the painter of Ulster life in Ulster speech that he has achieved the best work. He shows a tendency towards the drama of ideas, but he is never carried off his feet by didacticism. He has reflected the drab and even sordid life which has so much occupied the attention of the realists, but he has also displayed the nobility and grandeur which are as real ingredients of human nature as paltry meanness and poverty of soul. He has shown that he possesses two essential qualities of the playwright—the capacity to observe sympathetically and the imagination to create dramatically. He has another faculty

necessary to the dramatist: he can write natural, forceful dialogue. Whether he is using the dialect of Ulster, the Cockney vernacular, or standard English, Mr. Ervine's dialogue is almost always lively and dramatically adequate. The provisional estimate which we make of Mr. Ervine's drama leads us to expect further work which, if it maintains the standard he has already set up, will be worthy, and which, if it surpasses it, may well place him amongst the most eminent of modern dramatists.

CHAPTER XVII

FAIRY TALES

THIS book is concerned with the growth and tendency of modern English drama, and in attempting to study these things we have considered certain writers and their works. It must, however, be borne in mind that all through the years which have come under this survey many theatres were flourishing and the plays of which we have treated formed but a small part of the theatrical output. To study even a substantial proportion of the practising playwrights since 1890 would be a very large affair and a task beyond the scope and purpose of this book. But this does not mean that all those dramatists to whom no reference is made are negligible.

There was Wilde who in the 'nineties made contributions of at least two kinds. In such plays as *An Ideal Husband* and *A Woman of No Importance* he carried on the serious problem play, flavoured with sentimentalism and depending not a little on those theatrical situations which gave the actor and actress the opportunity they like for strong histrionic effect. They are what "the profession" call "good theatre." In this respect they maintain the tradition, to a large extent French, which was upheld by such a dramatist as Grundy. Wilde's second, and perhaps especial, contribution was the quality of his dialogue. He depended for relief on coruscating paradox. He filled his plays with a new kind of wit-trap, to use Fielding's term, which consisted of dazzling epigram and verbal absurdity. This device, coupled with equal absurdity of farcical situation,

reached its height in *The Importance of Being Earnest.* Or perhaps we should say its depth, for to-day these fireworks are rather damp squibs. We may see some influence of this manner in the dialogue of Sir Arthur Pinero and Mr. Shaw, but on the whole Wilde's dramatic work seems to have fallen to the spot from which it was fired.

Then there is the host of writers who with less striking qualities than Wilde have been obviously before the public for the past ten or twenty years. Marshall, Davies, Esmond, Mr. Haddon Chambers, Mr. Sutro, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Maugham are all of them dramatists who have helped to meet the needs of the theatres and have won popularity and success. Their work is diverse, consisting of varied kinds of play and showing differing attitudes of mind. They are men who, broadly speaking, have gauged aright what the public wants. They have, each in his own fashion, maintained the tradition of the drama which belongs to the theatre rather than to life. Their plays conform to the stage world ; and whether they are flavoured by didactic idea or are frankly and merely amusing they belong to the older school of sentimental drama or comedy of situation which prevailed in the nineteenth century—and for a long while before that—and which will probably continue to earn popularity and theatrical success for many a day to come. When they do not come under either of those headings still in the main they spring from the stage rather than from life. If the characters which people them have life, it is often only the apparent vitality of the string-moved puppet, and not that real human essence from which alone great art is made.

The fact is that for one reason or another the public at present does not want art in the theatre. It goes, as it says, to be amused ; and it does not regard art as an amusement. On the other hand the kind of play written by such dramatists as we have just named does amuse them in various ways. Some of the drama which we have studied with more care has also gained popularity. Sir Arthur Pinero, Mr. Shaw, to some extent Mr. Galsworthy, have won either fame or

notoriety and they may presumably be regarded as successful dramatists. One play each of Stanley Houghton and Miss Sowerby met with public applause. The Irish dramatists have had a success which sprang largely from the particular theatrical circumstances of Dublin. On the other hand a large number of the plays with which we have dealt have found but a cold reception.

In according a poor welcome to the realism of Mr. Barker and Miss Elizabeth Baker, to the didacticism of some of Mr. Galsworthy's plays and to the cynicism of Hankin, the public perhaps exhibited a healthy instinct. In so far as rejection implies a desire for something which ennobles and expands the heart it is justifiable. But if it represents only a refusal to regard the actuality of life the instinct is less laudable. Drama, like all art, is essentially a means of liberating the human spirit. It is possible, as the greatest dramatists have shown, to effect this liberation without sacrificing truth. This is the achievement of the greatest art. The smaller artist turns his back on life, or at best regards it with only a sidelong glance and creates a world which is not merely fictitious, but which more or less contravenes the eternal verities. Whether the resemblance to life as we know it is superficially accurate or not makes no difference: it cannot satisfy or abide. Sometimes the dramatist will seek immunity by escaping, and helping his audience to escape, to a realm of fancy where the criteria of truth seem to have no value or application.

Such a method is no doubt justifiable up to a point. In some measure all farce and the absurder kind of comedy come within this category. Another type of play belonging to this class is represented by *The Tempest*. But *The Tempest* is only superficially untrue. If it were not made of the stuff of life it would have perished long ago. Farce serves its purpose, and though it may rank below other kinds of drama it is far from being despicable. What produces honest mirth is never despicable. Nor is it necessarily ephemeral, as Shakespeare has shown, when it embodies real humour. Can Falstaff ever wither? But when it lives, it

lives for the human truth which it contains. True humour as much as true pathos must have human nature as its essence.

The desire to escape from the world of finite reality to the world of infinite attainment is inherent in human nature. What else are many dreams, we are told, but a fulfilment in the realm of unlimited possibility of the strivings and the yearnings which can never come to fruition on the plane of actual living. To satisfy this need is one of the greatest functions of art. To the child of childhood, to the child in manhood, the fairy tale makes an eternal appeal. We must all admit that in certain moods we are pleased best with the happy ending. The advent of Prince Charming to pluck the lady of our fancy's love from sorrow to prosperity, the noble Jack who eventually destroys the last fell giant are always welcome. Surely only a curmudgeon or a fish could feel no pleasurable thrill when, by a trick of the impossible, woe is turned to weal. Yet art can do more. When we lay aside the delicate garment of childhood and put on that less charming, but not less beautiful, robe of maturity, the spirit craves for something deeper, something which partakes of life as well as of dreamland. This craving implies a serious attitude to life : not a miserable or morbid gloating over the sorrow of being, but a steadfast intention to face actuality.

To-day it is unconventional to regard drama as satisfying this need. Life, people say, is hard enough and sad enough : give us in the theatre something to make us forget it. That is the instinct which produces the fairy tale. The trouble is that the modern fairy tale is too often not merely fanciful but meretricious. It springs not from honest fancy but from a false interpretation of human nature. It stimulates callous emotions by sensationalism or perverted emotions by sentimentalism. It is made not of the exquisite fragrance which fancy distils from life, but from the cheap scents or the noxious drugs which the play-maker finds stored in the theatrical cupboard. Such a brew may intoxicate or anæsthetize, but it gives no nourishment or deep joy to

the human spirit. Society in the turmoil of our hurrying civilization is weary and jaded, and it readily gulps down these cordials which give a few hours' respite from vexation of spirit. So the finer palate has become dulled, and only by a slow process of education, by a carefully graded diet of honest food, will it be restored. In the meantime simple food will lie rejected. But art is a food which though rejected is not perishable. It will keep and find a welcome when a taste for the best is recovered.

The modern English stage has enough and to spare of the stuff which gives "the false joy of the theatre." There is, and presumably as long as it is wanted there always will be, an inexhaustible stream of that meretricious, or at best vapid, stuff which makes fortunes, and, to give the devil his due, often destroys fortunes. But there is little of the genuine fairy tale, that delightful unreality, not wholly unreal, which supplies a natural craving. The fairy tale which is a mere negation of the truth is false and bad. The genuine fairy tale soars above the low level of actual living, but it remains in touch with life. It may seem unlike truth, but never destroys it: it lifts truth to a higher, rarer atmosphere. The false fairy tale to-day passes for the true and an uncritical public receives from it the satisfaction it seeks. It is Sir James Barrie who stands out prominently as the modern dramatist who brings fairyland on to the stage. He is a teller of fairy tales which are charming, but which are rarely insignificant. In *Peter Pan* he has appealed to the child in us all. It is essential play, in which the emotions and sensations are delicately stimulated and amply satisfied. Laughter, terror, tears all find a place, but none in too full measure. It is a play in many respects unique not only in Sir James Barrie's own repertory, but in the annals of the drama.

What is particularly noticeable in Sir James Barrie's work is his delicacy of touch. He has inimitable skill in lightly ruffling the surface of our emotions without stirring them to a great depth. He has succeeded in what the eighteenth century strove but failed to achieve—sentimental comedy.

The sentimental element is not always present. There is little in *The Admirable Crichton.* But there is an undercurrent of seriousness, which differentiates the play from pure comedy. Here Sir James Barrie seems to show some of the more delicate qualities which Mr. Shaw exercises in such a play as *You Never Can Tell.* He laughs lightly at the eccentricity of the well-meaning theorist, Lord Loam, who reduces his unhappy staff of servants, not to mention his own family, to the extreme depths of discomfort by insisting on periodic tea drinking in the drawing-room by those who are more at home in the servants' hall. He shows also the unreality and at the same time the reality of social gradation which is no more obvious above stairs than below. He pours ridicule on the idyllic conception of a return from civilization to nature, and shows how a return to nature affects social values. On the desert island where Lord Loam's yachting party is marooned the strongest takes command. That man is Crichton, erstwhile the obsequious butler. But not even then are social grades abolished. Crichton, invested with the power which comes from inherent strength of character in himself and incapacity in his companions, uses it for establishing a new social organization in which he is the snobbish aristocrat and the fallen great are his solicitous underlings. When the peculiar circumstances give place to the old order and the party is restored to civilization the menial habits reassert themselves and Lord Loam and his family regain the manner which characterizes their social superiority.

None of his earlier plays shows such an extent of didactic purpose as *The Admirable Crichton.* They tell a pleasant and pretty story, but they are not primarily plays of ideas. In *The Admirable Crichton,* with all its bright absurdity and comic by-play, we recognize a serious attempt to criticize social conventions. Of these pretty stories *What Every Woman Knows* and *Quality Street* are typical, yet they differ widely from one another. *What Every Woman Knows* catches something of the seriousness of the sex drama of writers like Sir Arthur Pinero. *Quality Street* breathes the

musk and lavender of the atmosphere of *Cranford*. With perfect sympathy, but with a keen eye for the comic, Sir James Barrie depicts the elaborately simple life of the maiden ladies of a day when womanhood lacked the opportunities for vital expression which the women of to-day demand. In both plays a serious idea underlies the laughter. Every woman who loves her husband knows his limitations and her contribution to his success. John Shand is an earnest Scot who has attained a high political position, but he has unfortunately not learned to laugh. When finally he is saved it is through his simple, splendid wife who helps him to perceive his own limitations. In *Quality Street* the foibles of the delightful, old world ladies at once amuse and charm us; but beneath the comedy lies the tragedy of thwarted instinct. The eternal pathos of age and of the slipping away together of youth and beauty and of the opportunity to realize life mingles tears with the laughter.

In less degree an undercurrent of emotion is present in *Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire* and *A Kiss for Cinderella*. It is in Sir James Barrie's short plays written under the immediate influence of the Great War that sentiment is most marked. There is a beautiful poignancy in the figure of the old Colonel in *Barbara's Wedding*. His body and mind are equally frail, and he is unable to realize the storm which has swept over the world. He cannot understand how his adopted granddaughter comes to marry Dering. Dering was the gardener; now he is a captain in the army. It is all too puzzling. And then where is his grandson, Billy, whom he remembers as the man she was to marry? Where is Billy's friend, Karl, the jolly German boy? Gradually he half perceives it all. A war is raging. So that is why the cricket on the green has ceased. Billy and Karl are dead. Dering is in khaki; Barbara is in nurse's uniform. In *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* the comedy is more hilarious and the pathos deeper. It may all be quite impossible, but undoubtedly Sir James Barrie has caught and registered a real sentiment in the desire of this winning old charwoman to have a share in the national sacrifice. Similarly in *The New Word* he has

depicted an emotion which must have stirred thousands of fathers and sons when the time came for the young men to join the army. In no case does the tragic note sound fully, but one cannot reject the appeal which these plays make.

In all his work Sir James Barrie shows us very simple, humble folk. He confesses in one of those delightfully chatty stage-directions, which give his printed plays a charm that not even the actor can convey, that he has " a weakness for persons who don't get on." His sympathies are so alive and his intuition is so subtle that he perceives acutely the joy and sorrow of very ordinary life. He has the knack of presenting the emotions that common folk feel, or at least like to feel under his influence. He does not purge the spirit with pity and terror, nor does he scour us in a cleansing bath of laughter. He stimulates us just sufficiently to provoke the tears and smiles which bring relief to the tense heart. The great dramatists project us on to the heights : Sir James Barrie walks beside us on life's highway. He has achieved immense popularity and he has done it by appealing to the normal man. Great tragedy and great comedy to-day receive a limited welcome ; but Sir James Barrie is accepted by the multitude. The fact is that he demands little effort. He strains neither the mind nor the emotions. It is easy to appreciate his work because he has the psychological insight and the artistic tact which enable him to say and show the things which every one of us feels and wants skill to express. That is a great gift ; and although his work may not be great art which satisfies the deepest cravings of the human spirit, it meets the average demand and is honest and truthful.

A noticeable characteristic of Sir James Barrie's work is its fanciful quality. He claims and exercises the right of the teller of fairy tales to transcend the limits of natural possibility. If we are to follow him it can only be on the wings of imagination. We must accept the conditions of dreamland in *A Kiss for Cinderella* or *Barbara's Wedding*. In other plays supernaturalism of a more definite kind is an

inseparable element. One of the short war-time plays, *A Well-Remembered Voice*, reflects the interest in psychic phenomena which universal bereavement spread so widely. The scene opens with spirit rappings which are checked by the incredulity of the dead boy's father. But it is to his father that the spirit of Dick appears and we listen to the converse of the living and the dead and hear details of the spirit life beyond the trenches and the grave.

In *Dear Brutus* (1917) supernaturalism is exploited still further and more effectively. Underlying this play is a serious intention, though it is given the appearance of comedy. The meaning of the cryptic title lies in Shakespeare's lines :

> The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
> But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

This is the central idea of the play. Character is fate and even in other circumstances we should be essentially the same as we are in our present conditions. A multifarious party is staying with a mysterious old man called Lob. He embodies the supernatural powers, the love of mischief, and the spirit of nature which make up the character of the essentially English fairy, Robin Goodfellow,—Shakespeare's Puck, that "lob of spirits." Through the agency of his potent magic his guests are translated to the world of might-have-been. Their common quality is a desire to have another chance and through Lob's power they are given it. In the end we see that the chance matters little, but the stuff of which we are made matters much. If we are to change, it will not be as the result of happy accident but because we strive. It is old but sound philosophy, not obscure but none the worse for reiteration. This a stern law of life, yet it is a law which seems to have its exceptions. Once in a while the second chance may give the needed opportunity for a real change. At the close of the play we wonder, not without hope, whether the Dearths may not be able to benefit by their strange experience and at length make something worthy out of their broken lives. If they do, it will be because after all there is somewhat in their characters that

can seize and exploit the second opportunity which fate allows them.

Another play which depends on supernatural machinery is *Mary Rose*. Here again we must accept the possibility of dual existence. Just as Lob transports his guests beyond the threshold of waking life to a counterpart existence in another world, so the reputed magic of the Western Isles of Scotland is the agency by which Mary Rose is conveyed to a fairy world of spirit. In this play Sir James Barrie introduces more sentiment than is found in *Dear Brutus*, but in the two plays the emotional theme is similar. In both cases it is paternal yearning, a subject which Sir James Barrie has dealt with frequently and beautifully. The pathos of *Dear Brutus* is in the happiness of Dearth, the artist, in the joyous company of his beloved daughter, Margaret. In real life he is a degraded creature, tied to a wife in loveless, childless union. When we see him in the world of might-have-been he is a widower, but richly endowed with the joy which his dream daughter bestows. When the change is reversed and like the rest he is restored to the life of actuality we feel the pang with which he realizes that his daughter must give place to the woman to whom he is bound. In *Mary Rose* it is a mother's love for her son which inspires the play with its poignant beauty.

Mary Rose is boldly executed. With a daring device the limitations of time are overridden. The present and the past are merged into one and we must accept the possibilities of a life where spirit has escaped from physical form. In the Island scene where Mary Rose is spirited away to the land of faery the supernaturalism is skilful and effective; but in the last scene it is less successful. Mary Rose who had lost her babe by her translation regains him when her ghost revisits the world of living and meets the stalwart Australian soldier who was once her child. The scene is not wholly persuasive and we are left with the impression that a stage trick has been practised on us.

It is perhaps true that speaking generally Sir James Barrie's work is not especially significant in the evolution of

the drama. But in this one respect, his bold treatment of psychical questions, his example seems likely to prove influential. It is matter of frequent remark that the Great War gave a great stimulus to popular interest in spiritualism and the many phenomena and tricks on which spiritualism depends. Thousands of men and women who were sceptical or incredulous became convinced believers in the possibility of regaining contact with the spirits of the dead. Sir James Barrie has therefore done nothing totally contrary to popular belief in exploiting what may be termed spiritualistic machinery.

Nor is he the only dramatist who has worked on these lines. It is perhaps not an unnatural progress from the fairy land of *Peter Pan* to Lob's Wood where men and women in evening dress live the life of dream and imagination, and thence to the spirit world of *A Well-Remembered Voice* and *Mary Rose* where living and dead parents and children meet and converse. But it is striking when so thoroughly realistic and practical an artist as Sir Arthur Pinero follows, rather heavily it is true, on the same path. We miss the aery tread of Sir James Barrie in Sir Arthur Pinero's *The Enchanted Cottage* (1922), but there can be little question that the dramatist has been profoundly influenced by this side of Sir James Barrie's work. Up to a point it is typically Pinero-esque, with the stock figures of his plays and the usual kind of dialogue. But in its element of magic, and the interweaving of the world of dreams and actuality, and the overleaping of the bounds of time, *The Enchanted Cottage* shows this new tendency of dramatists to reach past the limits of the physical to the great unknown beyond. Other dramatists are experimenting on similar lines. Mr. Drinkwater has introduced a supernatural device into his most recent play, *Mary Stuart*, to which reference will be made in due course ; and we shall notice a similarity to *Mary Rose* in Lord Dunsany's *If*. Still more remarkable and more interesting as an experiment in the supernatural is Mr. Masefield's *Melloney Holtspur* which will be treated fully in the next chapter. This tendency, as we have seen, is a

marked feature of Irish drama, and it can be traced back to the influence of such significant dramatists as Ibsen and M. Maeterlinck. Nevertheless these signs in purely English drama are noteworthy, and there is no doubt that a great impulse in this direction has been given by Sir James Barrie.

CHAPTER XVIII

MASEFIELD

If the Great War has done anything for English drama it seems to have destroyed the particular kind of realism which was so striking a feature of a certain school during the years before 1914. We have seen the surprising change of direction which Sir Arthur Pinero shows in his latest work, and the tendency of Sir James Barrie's more recent plays. The most significant quality of the newest type of drama is imagination. There are dramatists who see that realism is not reality and that reality may be achieved on the imaginative plane. This tendency has nothing to do with those playwrights who escaped reality as well as realism by turning their backs on life, those who, as we noticed in the last chapter, satisfied the human craving for the fairy tale by a mere negation of truth. What is significant is the revolt against bare realism as such, against the tendency to use drama as a means for depicting the bourgeois life of the day and studying the social and ethical problems which beset society. As if they felt the atmosphere of the realistic and didactic drama to be stuffy and repressive certain dramatists have turned away from the milieu and the problems which occupied so many writers from Mr. Shaw to Miss Baker.

The Great War has opened out so many other problems, has suggested such wide fields of being to the human mind, and has created such vast cravings, that those problems and that kind of art seem petty. Yet it lingers. Miss Baker's *Miss Robinson* was first produced but two days before the armistice put a stop to overt war. Miss Clemence Dane

more recently has written an arresting play, interesting for its thesis and striking in its realism, in *A Bill of Divorcement*. Mr. Galsworthy's recent plays show no relaxation of realistic method. Nevertheless the realistic form to which we were becoming accustomed in 1914 to-day seems *démodé*.

At most however can we say that the Great War hastened its decay. For many years the countervailing tendency was growing. Synge and certain of his Irish followers had demonstrated the emancipation that would be won by casting off the social shackles of dramatic convention. Realizing the essential truth of Wordsworth's doctrine that the sophistication of society tends to smooth out the hills and valleys of human emotion, Synge went to a simpler social level in the peasantry of Ireland. Wordsworth chose "humble and rustic life" as the material of poetry, "because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature." [1]

Such seems to have been Synge's belief, if we may judge from his practice. In *Riders to the Sea* he has shown triumphantly the immense tragic effect that may be produced from the simplest human material "incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature." This also appears to have been the basis of Mr. Masefield's early dramatic work. *The Tragedy of Nan* (1908) is not only Mr. Masefield's greatest play: it is also the greatest example of the possibility of moulding great drama from the simple material of rustic life It is up to a point realistic; but the

[1] Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800 ed.

time being definitely carried back to the first decade of the nineteenth century and the story being concerned with the lives of the peasantry, there is no place for the scenes and themes of modern middle-class life. The dramatist has no concern with the particular social problems of the day ; he is occupied only with the elementary passions of man.

It is a simple story. Nan Hardwick is the orphan daughter of a man hanged for sheep stealing. She lives with her uncle, whose wife, Mrs. Pargetter, makes her life a hell. Her uncle is a kindly, sympathetic soul, who tries in his clumsy way to befriend her ; but even he is alienated through his wife's cunning. To add to her aunt's dislike she loves and is loved by Dick Gurvil, a rustic materialist, who wins her love, raises her spirit on a high wave of passion and then under the subtle influence of Mrs. Pargetter deserts her for Jenny Pargetter. As fate besets her and cruelty closes in on her sensitive spirit the soul of Nan grows and puts forth a flower of tragic beauty. Her loneliness would be unrelieved but for the doddering old Gaffer. With exquisite skill and the true sense of a poet Mr. Masefield has introduced an elusive, other-worldly beauty through the medium of this half-doting, half-inspired old man. As he sits by the chimney corner piping his memories of the dead beauty, the maid whom long ago he wedded, the wife whose burial followed so soon that in the dim distance of memory it seems almost to be a bridal, it is as if we hear blowing from elf-land the horn of the golden rider who fetched his flower away. Rapt beyond dotage to the realm of poetry the Gaffer lifts us above the mundane scene of ignoble treachery and relentless cruelty to the high places of the imagination.

With supreme craftsmanship Mr. Masefield weaves the character of the old dotard into the very tissue of the play. He serves as a link between the human story and the background of external nature. It is hardly adequate to speak of nature as being a background. The Severn bore is almost a person of the play. First from the words of the Gaffer we feel the beauty and the greed of the wonderful Severn tide. We hear a distant whisper of its motion far out at sea.

We see it slowly coming up over the mudflats, invading the land. Then with accumulated force it drives its way up the narrow channel, tearing and sweeping all before it. To Nan in her sorrow and her loneliness it comes as a friend, terrible but comforting. Her spirit is caught by the lyrical rapture which possesses the old man as he describes the alluring, fatal beauty of the tide :

> *Gaffer.* Singing. Singing. And the sea a-roaring after. O, it takes them. They stand out in the river. And it goes over them. Over them. Over them. One roarin' rush.
>
> *Nan.* Deep. Deep. Water in their eyes. Over their hair. And to-night it be the harvest tide.
>
> *Gaffer* (*as though waking from a dream*). The salmon fishers'll lose their nets to-night. The tide'll sweep them away. O, I've known it. It takes the nets up miles. Miles. They find 'em high up. Beyond Glorster. Beyond 'Artpury. Girt golden flag-flowers over 'em. And apple-trees a-growin' over 'em. Apples of red and apples of gold. They fall into the water. The water be still there, where the apples fall. The nets 'ave apples in them.
>
> *Nan.* And fish, gaffer ?
>
> *Gaffer.* Strange fish. Strange fish out of the sea.
>
> *Nan.* Yes. Strange fish indeed, gaffer. A strange fish in the nets to-morrow. A dumb thing. Knocking agen the bridges. Something white. Something white in the water. They'd pull me out. Men would. They'd touch my body. (*Shuddering*) I couldn't. I couldn't.

Dick Gurvil had deserted her in the very moment of her high passion. He had found an excuse in the discovery that her father had been hanged : his father would never consent to such a match. Really it was his own fear, inculcated by Mrs. Pargetter who wants him for Jenny, that marriage with Nan would mean poverty. His voluptuous, ease-loving nature cannot contemplate discomfort and struggle. All the circumstances of rejection heighten Nan's shame and anguish, and life is very bitter. The Gaffer is her friend, but his support is weak. She will woo the comfort of the strong and beautiful tide. Then comes with unexpected suddenness the dramatic announcement that the real culprit has confessed to the crime for which Nan's father has suffered death. An officer brings her £50 as compensation. This is indeed good fortune, think all the company. To Nan it is but another and the bitterest blow of an ironic fate.

Fifty pieces of gold for the life of a strong, loving, innocent man. Fifty little shining round things in place of her life's happiness.

Dick Gurvil's conscience is malleable and he is stricken by the wrong he has done to poor Miss Nan. He would make amends and marry her after all. But Nan has this night a deep insight into the human heart: she sees the mercenary baseness of this greedy man. So she tests him. The only obstacle now is Mrs. Pargetter, who will bitterly resent his desertion of Jenny; but that can easily be overcome. Nan has given amply of her gold to the Gaffer to buy the white headstone with which he longs to mark the grave of his long dead bride; but enough remains. She bids Dick take it to Mrs. Pargetter as a peace offering. Dick hesitates. "I knew it. I knew it," cries Nan in her anguish. At least he shall never treat another woman as he has treated her in his greed.

> I see very plain to-night, Dick. I see right, right into you. Right down.

And she makes him see himself as the wretch he is, the robber of women's hearts, the destroyer of women's souls.

> No, no, oh no. Oh young man in your beauty—Young man in your strong hunger. I will spare those women.

She is transfigured into an engine of mercy and justice, the instrument of divine retribution, as she stabs him dead. As the rest run in at his cries "a murmuring and rushing noise is heard as the tide sweeps up from the sea." It is sweet music to the Gaffer. "It be coming," he shouts. "Out of the wells of the sea. The eagles of the sea hear it. They sharp their beaks." As the noise grows louder and nearer with onrushing water Nan goes out to her rest. Laughingly she welcomes it: "The tide be coming up the river." The rush becomes a roar as the tide surges up to take her. "A strange fish in the nets to-morrow," is her farewell word as she goes out to embrace death.

The play has been stigmatized as a low, sordid story of a poor girl crushed to death by beastly and merciless cruelty.

If it were that and that alone it would indeed be a repulsive play. But it is much more than that. Calculating, callous cruelty has hardly ever been depicted with greater power, but it is only the substratum of the play. The essence of the tragedy is to be found not in the ignoble and horrible environment of this girl, but in the soul of Nan herself. Mrs. Pargetter's meanness and cunning cruelty, Dick Gurvil's selfish treachery, the hardness of Jenny's poverty-stricken little heart, the too easy acquiescence of her not unkind but weak uncle, all combine to surround Nan's life with an iron ring of implacable circumstance. This girl might have grown gradually to beautiful, happy maturity under the mellowing influence of love and kindness. The pressure of besetting fate forces her soul to an unnaturally fast growth. The influence of sorrow may be beneficent, but if it overtakes the spirit too suddenly and too violently it may overwhelm. Her cup of sorrow is too deep and too bitter. Instead of sweetening her nature and tempering her sympathies it swells her heart with tragic intensity. Suddenly she stands erect, no longer a girl but a woman impelled by all the force of thwarted passion. How she could have loved we may judge from the gentle affection which she lavishes on the old Gaffer, the only object on which she can bestow herself. There is something infinitely touching and infinitely beautiful in this exhibition of maternal love, for it is with a mother's solicitude that this girl clings to and cares for the old man who is once again as weak and as imaginative as a child. But it cannot suffice. Her spirit has suffered too deep a hurt. Not even the impotent need of the Gaffer or the sympathy which is established between them are bonds strong enough to hold her to life. She has reached the topmost point of tragedy when her heart which might have flowered so wondrously knows that there is only one way in which her soul's need can be satisfied. Death is the only exit.

Mr. Masefield has here succeeded in doing a very difficult thing. He has made high tragedy of the life of the folk. Despite the tradition and practice of the ages Wordsworth

saw that this could be done in poetry, but he never contemplated the possibility of great tragic drama in prose. On the contrary he implies that tragedy is unbearably poignant unless it is in verse. Except for rare and not wholly successful experiments, until recent times there has been an overwhelming tendency for tragedy to be written in verse and to deal with subjects remote from common life. By moving his persons on a high social plane, by magnifying his characters to a superhuman size, or by removing his theme to a far-off land or distant time, the tragic writer has lifted his drama above the level on which his audience normally lives and feels. By these methods the dramatist fulfils an essential condition of tragedy. He sublimates the passion which he evokes, purging it of that personal quality which it will possess if it is too close to the ordinary conditions of life. It enables him safely to produce deep passion without risk of dragging down the spirit to the level of our everyday experience and mingling it with the sorrow that pertains to our own lives. On the contrary it opens a window through which the soul may see wider vistas of human woe, and above all, if it be great tragedy, it will show a vision of the indomitable greatness of humanity. The effect will be not depression but elevation, not debasement but ennoblement of the spirit.

It was Ibsen, more than any man in recent times, who directed dramatists to seek themes of tragedy in the fields of everyday life. Sometimes he failed; he also succeeded. His followers usually failed. When they failed it was because they did not perceive the *raison d'être* of tragedy. Even when they succeeded in making tragedy proceed inevitably to its dénouement they did not realize that tragedy must satisfy a natural craving of the human mind to see on the imaginative plane a working out of the vast potentialities that underlie the limited conscious life. From that hidden mysterious world of the unconscious, with its dark unfathomed depths which surge below our rational being, come forth vague, unformulated longings. Kept down by the repressions which hold sway during ordinary conscious

existence these cravings seek satisfaction. In the previous chapter we have suggested that the fairy tale meets a common need of all men. The function of tragedy is analogous though the direction is different. The problem before the artist who seeks to make tragedy of the stuff of common life is so to glorify his work that these natural cravings are satisfied. Synge, learning not a little from Ibsen, realized the potency of a literary vehicle which appealed to the imagination by its rich imagery and to the ear by its harmonious rhythm. He also saw the value of utilizing the forces of external nature to give a sense of power and vastness. In dramatizing the spirit of the glen or the untutored ocean of the western isles he was following a sure instinct, but after all he was only doing what Shakespeare had done with such marvellous effect in *King Lear*.

In *The Tragedy of Nan* Mr. Masefield has used a similar device in forcing into his service the awful beauty of the Severn tide. He has also followed Synge in the matter of literary vehicle. In many respects the diction is plain and homely, but in the third act, although it never attains the form of verse, it rises to great heights of lyrical beauty. It is essentially poetic in its captivating rhythm and in the weird and mysterious beauty of its imagery. In particular the conversation of Nan and the Gaffer when her soul resounds to his while he tells her of the power and beauty of the tide is surely nothing if it is not poetry. By these devices, applied with great skill, and by the inherent beauty and strength of the person of Nan Mr. Masefield has from the simplest, commonest stuff made a tragedy which is beautiful and elevating.

In two other short plays Mr. Masefield has taken tragic material from rustic life. But neither *The Campden Wonder* (1907) nor *Mrs. Harrison*, its sequel, has the tragic and poetic qualities of *The Tragedy of Nan*. They may justly be described as sordid. Brutal violence and the bitter irony of circumstance combine to make the plays forceful, but they are unrelieved by the nobler elements to be found in *Nan*.

Mr. Masefield is one of the most versatile writers of the

day. In drama alone he has written work of many and differing kinds. After his remarkable achievement in *The Tragedy of Nan* one might have expected him to exploit the vein of rustic life. Instead he turned to Roman history and produced in 1910 *Pompey the Great*. His method of writing historical drama bears some resemblance to that of Lady Gregory. Instead of elevating his manner and diction by the usual means he takes the theme of Pompey's last struggle with Cæsar and treats it with the greatest simplicity. Not only is the medium not verse, it is prose of a particularly direct and undecorated kind. Occasionally he allows a certain licence to the eloquence of Cotta or the imagination of Pompey; but vivid terseness is more usual. This is typical:

> *Pompey.* I have made my plan.
> (*Sternly.*) I will abide by it. To your place. Murmur no more. No little gust of passion shall set me wavering.
> (*A Voice without and a trumpet.*
> *Voice.* Present arms. Port arms. Pass friend. Present arms.
> *Pompey.* Life is nothing. It is the way of life which is so much. Enter there.
> *Cotta* (*entering*). The body, my lord. With the trumpet.

In the first two acts we see the beginning of the Civil War and the defeat of Cæsar at Dyrrachium. We do not actually witness the fight. Cæsar is not even one of the *dramatis personæ*. But we see the reflection of the struggle in Pompey and his entourage. During these two acts the drama moves quietly but with growing tensity to the conflict between Pompey and his generals on the question whether to follow Fabian tactics or to give Cæsar battle. Pompey doggedly refuses to abandon the waiting game which he is winning so satisfactorily, but circumstances travel past him and he is forced against his better judgement to fight. In the second act the play rises to a high pitch of tragic power which is not recaptured. The third act unfolds the last episode of Pompey's life. Pharsalia has been fought and Pompey, defeated, is now fleeing to Egypt. The scene takes place on board ship and the final act of Egyptian treachery, the murder of Pompey as he neared the shore in a small

boat, is conveyed by those who are watching. We are shown too little in this last act. In fact throughout the play dramatic force is weakened by a proneness to report rather than to display.

In Act III. Mr. Masefield has the opportunity he so obviously loves of depicting a sea scene. We see and hear the sailors working on board ship to the tune of a chanty. From the conversation of the Captain and members of the crew we learn of the ruin of Pharsalia and the events that take place off the stage during the scene. Into the mouths of these simple folk Mr. Masefield puts the plainest language. The simplicity of thought and diction which are so noticeable a feature of the play appear most strikingly in the talk of these sea-farers :

> *The Capt.* It makes your blood boil, though. A week back they'd have crawled all round Pompey for a chance to kiss his footman's boots. Now they're going to drive him out.
>
> *The Mate.* Well, sir. You can't expect gratitude from a king, they say. The world's wide. There's other lands besides Egypt. Egypt's got trouble enough, without Pompey. What did he come here for ? That's what I don't see.
>
> *The Capt.* He's had a misfortune. One doesn't know where to turn when one's had a misfortune. And having a wife and that. Very likely he's beside himself, for all he doesn't take on.

In this play it seems as if the poet were striving his utmost to check any tendency to poetry. He is successful in all but a few rare passages in suppressing the external features of the poetic manner, but the poetic quality is there, and through it the play lives. Then again it is as if the writer of *Nan* were repressing with rigid hand every sign of violent passion. Again he is successful, but the passion smoulders beneath the surface and we feel the emotional stress which underlies an apparently unruffled surface. This also adds to the force of the play. If this quality were maintained by a directer method of treatment in the last act Mr. Masefield would have scored a great success. As it is we are bound to feel that interesting as is his experiment it has not quite succeeded.[1]

[1] Since writing the above passage I have had the opportunity of perusing the revised form of the play which was prepared, I believe, for a performance

In his next dramatic phase Mr. Masefield turned to verse as the medium. *Philip the King* (1914) is a single act in which we witness the drama of the Spanish Armada reflected in the soul of King Philip. It has the minor interest of being a rare example of modern drama written in rime; but neither as verse nor as drama is it very impressive.

In 1915 appeared another tragedy, *The Faithful*. This is a Japanese story told in prose, interspersed with lyrical passages. It has more vital dramatic qualities than its predecessor, but still it does not touch the deeper chords of emotion. As one reads this tale of treacherous cruelty and remorseless revenge one wonders whether Mr. Masefield wrote the play under the influence of those tragedies of revenge which flourished in the days of Kyd and Marlowe and Shakespeare. The character of Kurano, the faithful servant whom nothing and no one can deter from his terrible vow of vengeance, is arresting. With the fidelity of Kent and the ruthlessness of Macbeth he suffers hardship and subordinates his own life and the lives of his loved ones to

by the Manchester University Dramatic Society in 1915. To the best of my knowledge the revisal has not been printed.

The changes in the first two acts consist mainly of excision. There is a tendency to remove colloquialisms and expressions with a peculiarly modern flavour of thought or wording. There is also some pruning of speeches which embody reported incident and of lyrical and rhetorical passages.

Act III. has been completely rewritten and in the process the main grounds of our criticisms have been removed. The person and character of Pompey are more prominent and the tragic effect is heightened. Emotion is evoked by what takes place on the scene and the drama depends far less on report. In the original version the Sailors, with their engaging chanty, the Captain and his Boy play a prominent, if somewhat irrelevant, part. Little or nothing of this is left, and despite the loss of the chanty one is bound to admit that the change is an improvement.

The general effect of the revision is undoubtedly to concentrate and intensify the dramatic quality. Instead of being a beautiful but vague anticlimax the third act carries the tragedy further and higher, until Pompey, blind to reason and expediency, is destroyed by his own magnificent obstinacy. Pathos has given place to the tragedy of a great man wrecked by an untoward fate of which his own character is a potent factor.

A greater emotional restraint and a more concentrated construction enhance the severity of the end. To add to it the character of Pompey is hardened. The wistful note in his acceptance of doom gives place to a tyrannical treatment of his subordinates. This is especially marked in Pompey's attitude to the Captain, to Lentulus, and to his own son, Sextus, who had not figured in the earlier version. The chief result is that something of the loveliness of the original is lost; but the total effect is gain rather than loss.

the act of revenge. Undaunted and indomitable he sacrifices all in bringing about the death of the tyrant who has ruined and killed his master Asano.

In 1917 Mr. Masefield returned to verse in *Good Friday* and once again he employs the riming couplet. The theme is the story of the condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus. The method is again indirect. As in parts of *Pompey the Great* and in *Philip the King* the action is reported. Jesus himself does not appear on the stage. Just as the mighty drama of the defeated Armada is shown us in the concentrating mirror of Philip's superstitious soul, so the great happenings of the first Good Friday are reflected in the souls of minor participants of the drama. We watch the workings of Pilate's mind ; we hear the pleadings and we see the fears of Pilate's wife, Procula ; we are deafened by the distant shouting of the infatuated mob ; we are brought into touch with the gentle victim through the babblings of the Madman, the only witness who testifies against this crime of Jew and Gentile. We learn from him and from the still less biased report of Longinus, the centurion, of the awful details of the crucifixion and the portents by which it was accompanied. Yet we miss the emotional stirrings of great tragedy. At one point however with consummate skill the dramatist seems to invest the Madman with the personality of Jesus and by his words to convey a sense of dramatic actuality. In a long passage of high lyrical beauty this half mad, half inspired outcast conveys through the recital of his own sufferings the mystery of the Passion which is being enacted at that moment. There is something of the weird and intangible beauty and spirituality of the old Gaffer of *Nan* in this most striking and effective character.

In this play, as in *Philip the King*, Mr. Masefield seems to be under the influence of classical forms. It may be that he was submitting himself even then to the drama of Racine which he has since followed more closely in his adaptations of *Esther* (1921) and *Berenice* (1921).

His latest play, *Melloney Holtspur* (1922), shows a violent reaction towards romanticism in both substance and form.

The play is so curiously involved, without being complex in plot, that it is scarcely describable. It is a daring play which cannot be judged finally until it has been produced on the stage. The action of the play takes place in two different periods of time which are treated simultaneously. The story, briefly, concerns the love of Lenda Copshrews and Bunny Mento, whose mother owns the family home of the ancient house of Holtspur. There is however a blight on their love because Lenda's father, Lonny Copshrews, had grievously wronged Bunny's aunt, Melloney Holtspur. Lonny and Melloney had loved twenty-two years before, but their spirits still haunt the house and mingle in the lives of the younger generation.

The first scene shows us the happenings of the present. Gradually time fades away and we see before our very eyes the scene that took place in that room in the distant past. We see this evil man of genius, Lonny, the celebrated painter, casting his spell over Melloney, winning her love. So it happened whilst these two were alive. We see the unexpected arrival of Lonny's wife, of whose existence Melloney had no idea. Shamed and angered Melloney dismisses the traitor who had won her heart by false pretences. The scene we witness is enacted by the ghosts that yet haunt the place. Lonny's widow, Mrs. Copshrews, is still alive, but she also takes part in this ghost scene.

Not only does time flow backwards and forwards, but these restless spirits mingle with the living. The idea of the play is that the sins of the father are visited on the children, and in order to embody this truth in dramatic form the playwright must show us the past and present. An obvious way would have been to inform us of the past by some narrative device and show us the consequences operating in the present. Or like Shakespeare in *The Winter's Tale* he might have put a gulf of time in the midst of the play. Mr. Masefield's imagination conceives a more direct method. The idea is made more vivid as well as the incidents. We actually hear the agony and despair of the spirit of Lonny when he perceives that it is his sin which is working the ruin of his daughter's happiness.

Lady Mento has heard of all the disgraceful deeds of Lenda's father. That very day she has learned by what might seem to be mere chance the blackest of his deeds, the treachery which had killed her sister Melloney. She tells Lenda. Lenda realizes that she cannot marry Bunny. The tormented ghost of her father is indeed tasting the bitterest cup that hell can brew. He had thought that he had already suffered the pangs of hell; but only now does he enter the innermost pit of torture. What is that torture? The knowledge that his sin is working itself out on his innocent daughter, Lenda.

We have already noted Mr. Masefield's treatment of revenge as a dramatic motive. Here again the idea of revenge is exploited. Although the sorrow of Lenda proceeds from inevitable law, the mainspring of fate seems to be the desire for vengeance that inspires the wandering ghost of Melloney and directs present events so that Lenda shall not marry Bunny. The play exhales the atmosphere of tragedy, but Mr. Masefield wills a happy ending. Up to a point the lives of this young couple seem to be shrouded in a destroying cloud of fate. Eternal law is made the pivot of this iron wheel of retribution. But there is another law—the law of atonement. Melloney's desire for vengeance is mollified by the sight of true love in Lenda and Bunny. Her distressed spirit is watching their sorrow and their love, and she can no longer oppose them.

> Ah, no, no! You must not part from each other—Let the old sin be; it has been punished enough. I have been punishing your father in my heart for all these years, yet wanted more vengeance still. You love each other. That atones for all the old sin and wipes it away. Oh, be happy, you two young things, while it is hawthorn with you. Bunny, my beloved, give me your hand. And you; I loved your father once; no, I love him still. I give you your lover's hand. Take it from me. I will love you, too, my child, that should have been my child. I will pray for all lovely things for both of you.

It is indeed a bold stage device that the lovers should be thus united by a visitant from beyond the boundary of life and time, and that she should actually speak words of blessing on their union.

Last of all we see the wraiths of Melloney and the man who wronged her but whom she still loves. The living have left the stage and the spirits of these two long dead lovers are face to face. The atmosphere is filled with the spirit of love. Vengeance has passed for ever from the soul of Melloney where now only forgiveness dwells. Atonement through love is complete and the distressed spirits melt into one through the uniting power of love.

No description can do justice to this queer but beautiful play. It must be studied in its entirety to be appreciated. Although the task of overcoming the time complication is very great it has been tackled with skill and a very large measure of success. There are certain points which might be criticized. In places the dialogue is somewhat burdened by explanatory narrative. At her first entrance the spirit of Melloney talks in the self-descriptive manner of the characters of medieval and early Tudor drama who bow themselves on to the stage with introductory speeches explaining who they are, or whence and why they come. The device is somewhat cumbrous, though from a disembodied spirit it comes perhaps less awkwardly than it would from a living character. Although the children who are introduced fill a definite part of the play there is a suspicion that the opportunity has been seized to display for its own sake what is certainly very skilful portraiture of the boys and girls of to-day. It would indeed be hard to find any play where children have been made so natural and convincing. What is less convincing is the dramatic need for giving them so large a share in the play.

In its bare plot the play goes little beyond the ordinary and conventional elements of melodrama. The supernatural element may impart a certain sensational thrill; but as a ghost story it is poor and in its details it follows well-worn tradition with its voices issuing from suits of armour, figures stepping from pictures, sliding panels, and what not. What gives the play its main interest is the philosophical idea which it embodies. It is not new. In a broad sense it is but a re-examination of the ancient problem of good and

evil which has inspired drama for many an age. It is the mystery of evil that inspires *Macbeth*. There Shakespeare opens the play by showing the baffling interaction of good and evil: "Fair is foul and foul is fair," is the first and ever recurrent note of that play. Shakespeare, although he embodies evil in the extra-human forms of the Witches, does not doubt the truth that Mr. Masefield puts into the mouth of Lenda: "The powers of evil are in men and women, Bunny." Like Shakespeare Mr. Masefield also sees that the powers of evil are to some extent beyond the lives and characters of individual men and women. Beyond and outside the lives of Lenda and Bunny are those forces of evil which were let loose by Lonny. Yet the individual is not powerless. Retribution sweeps over them with an apparently irresistible tide. The sins of the fathers must be visited on the children. But paradoxically enough it is through the children's love that atonement comes, and by atonement the tide is stemmed. The love of Lenda and Bunny in the first instance saves the souls of Lonny and Melloney, and through that act the young lovers find their own salvation. Melloney's desire for vengeance is dissipated and she becomes the instrument through whom Lenda and Bunny eventually are united. Even yet the newly loosed force of love has not exhausted itself, for the union of Lenda and Bunny has its repercussion in the spirit world where Lonny and Melloney at last find the salvation and peace which they had missed in life.

If Mr. Masefield has not solved the riddle which is insoluble he has, it seems, declared his faith. It is a faith very similar to that propounded with such glowing fervour by Shelley in his *Prometheus Unbound*. Mr. Masefield has the advantage of the biological teaching of the nineteenth century to strengthen him in the belief of the power of evil to stretch its grasp beyond the life of the individual to succeeding generations. What we know to-day of the force of heredity and the influence of environment enables us to realize as Shelley could not the omnipotence of evil. Leaving aside its theological implications we see in the figure

of Jupiter Shelley's idea of the omnipotence of evil. Innocent goodness and beauty are held in thrall by this baleful power. But evil is negative : it is a force which cannot be denied but which is contrary to life. So both poets posit something which is more powerful than omnipotence. Their faith in human life and progress compels them to accept the paradox. Shelley must perforce invent a Demogorgon who triumphs over the power of Jupiter and liberates the spirit of goodness and beauty. Self-sacrifice conquers tyranny. Love effects its own emancipation. Similarly in Mr. Masefield's philosophy the tide of evil must flow, and yet through love may come atonement and through atonement love. It is no solution ; but it is a clear declaration of faith.

Although this faith is not new it is peculiarly apposite to the present conditions of the world. When Shelley declared his belief in the saving force of love he looked on a Europe wrecked by war and hate. To-day the world is far nearer ruin than it was in 1820. The overt struggle of armies and navies has been succeeded by another struggle on the issue of which the fate of civilization depends. It is the conflict between the spirit of vengeance and the spirit of reconciliation. That is the real Great War which is being waged to-day with bitter acrimony in the heart of mankind. The cloud of battle is thick, the serried forces sway tumultuously : it is hard to see which side is winning. A League of Nations stands for reconciliation ; but noisy nationalism, militarism, armaments show that the spirit of vengeance is unbowed. Is it too far-fetched to see in *Melloney Holtspur* Mr. Masefield's contribution to this great struggle ?

One cannot fail to see certain points of contact between this play and some of the later works of Sir James Barrie. Like Sir James Barrie Mr. Masefield reaches out beyond the limits of reason and the senses to a spiritual world. We have already noted this tendency as conforming to a most marked feature of the general frame of mind which may be regarded as one consequence of the Great War.

As we have already remarked Mr. Masefield is an extremely versatile dramatist, but in whatever *genre* he is working he

always displays a great imaginative faculty. His apprenticeship was going forward just at the time when the realistic bourgeois play and the play of ideas were the chief features in dramatic development. These two kinds were apt to oust imagination, but Mr. Masefield, whatever he has written, has always proved himself a poet. His leading ideal has always been the search for beauty and his dominant quality has always been his interest in raw life. To say this is not to imply that he has no philosophical interests or social ideas. He has both. But in his work generally, and in his drama in particular, his interest is in humanity on the large plane of the imagination. He takes a king or he takes a peasant and depicts the human heart, the human weakness and the human strength that he sees in each. Without limiting himself to the ephemeral though important questions and conditions of the particular stage of human development which we have reached to-day he moves freely in the purlieus of the human heart and treats of its eternal passions. Conscious of its badness, and revolting against the cant and humbug of the art of a past day, he sometimes goes to the extreme of violence and crude brutality. Still he preserves in the end the spirit of the poet whose function it is to look upon the heart of man in its nakedness, to interpret life faithfully, and withal to seek beauty and ensue it. In his greatest work he has done this.

CHAPTER XIX

DRINKWATER

To say that Mr. Masefield the dramatist is essentially a poet does not mean that his main contribution is in verse. It is his attitude of mind towards life and towards his art that is poetic. Although it cannot be said that Mr. Masefield has founded a school (if indeed anybody founds a school in art), it is true that there is a slowly growing body of work which shows the same mental attitude as we find in his drama. It is the work of dramatists, having poetic qualities, whose aim is primarily constructive; who are concerned with human character rather than with social problems. Mr. Masefield has not impressed himself on his contemporaries as did Synge amongst Irish dramatists, but his spirit is common to a few. Some of the writers whom we have still to study show this common tendency so early that they cannot be regarded as mere followers of Mr. Masefield. The fact is that this reaction against naturalism and the drama of ideas was only one phase of a general swing of the pendulum in art and life. So far as the theatre was concerned the most powerful influence was undoubtedly Synge, who showed what use could be made on the modern stage of the raw material of unsophisticated humanity, and he, as well as Mr. Yeats, also demonstrated anew the practical possibility of conveying poetry into the theatre.

The writer who has achieved the greatest theatrical success along these lines is Mr. John Drinkwater. He has written plays in verse and in prose. He is also concerned not a little with philosophical ideas. But, in the broad sense in which

we have applied the term to Mr. Masefield, Mr. Drinkwater is essentially a poet : he is a maker rather than a mere critic. We have made the reservation that Mr. Drinkwater is concerned with philosophical ideas and, as we shall see, his work is sometimes implicitly critical ; but still his drama is in the main constructive rather than destructive.

In two verse plays written before the Great War we see the philosopher in Mr. Drinkwater. *Cophetua* is a one-act play ; *Rebellion* (1914) is a more considerable effort in three acts. We have seen how large a part was played in the drama of the twentieth century by the idea of self-expression. We have traced back to Ibsen and other thinkers of a previous age this belief in the vitality of man and in the necessity for liberation from the shackles of outworn convention. The drama which echoed this phase of social consciousness was mainly critical and dealt with the problem of escape. In other forms of art we find an expression of the idea of the essential greatness of life, whilst drama is busy showing up the littleness or badness of the external conditions by which man is cut off from a full enjoyment of life. A school of poetry in which Rupert Brooke stands as a typical figure was concerned with tasting life raw and undiluted. In Brooke's work his poem *The Great Lover* notably exemplifies this characteristic tendency of youth in the twentieth century. It was a philosophy of adventure and like all adventure it was highly dangerous. The puritan has not far to seek in order to find lamentable consequences which may justly be traced to this new attitude to life. But that does not necessarily condemn it. The human spirit must have a solid dwelling of which the walls are built of habit and over the windows of which hang thick curtains of convention to keep out the disturbing draughts and the scorching sun of the wild, destroying elements of human passion. But there are times when the atmosphere becomes vitiated, when the eye needs a ray direct from heaven and the blood goes slow for want of a breath of pure air. The curtains are drawn and the windows are thrown open and mankind leaps to a new life. Some are dazzled, others are

intoxicated by the unwonted freshness. It is a dangerous business this opening of the windows. But it is revivifying and in the end health-giving.

The Great War undoubtedly pushed too wide the windows which were being slowly opened by the bolder spirits. The draught blows somewhat uncomfortably about our necks when we want to sit quietly by the hearth, and the cry to-day for more discipline in life is neither unnatural nor unnecessary. But the breath of fresh air and the outlook on to the open country of human life have had at least one beneficial effect : they have modified our valuation of the idea of discipline. These are problems which have so far had little influence on English drama ; but in *Rebellion* Mr. Drinkwater has handled the idea as it influenced such poets as Rupert Brooke.

The first motive of the play is the struggle of the people for political liberty. They have rebelled against the tyranny of King Phane. Their leader is Narros, a poet, who champions them to the brink of victory. But all the turmoil and the trammelling circumstances of living seem to him to be only shackles which prevent him from tasting life. His love for Shubia, the Queen, is reciprocated, and he leaves the popular army on the eve of battle and goes to meet his lover by the mountains. Her summons is to him a call to the true life. Love seems to be the real existence. Doing and being in the fashion of men are a poor substitute for life.

> How they strut on the quays of the world.
> And the great ships of life go quickly on
> And never call them to their company.

In consequence of his desertion the rebels are defeated by Phane. Narros is captured, arraigned, and condemned to death. Then he makes his profession of faith. It is an assertion of his desire to live what he calls real life.

> When I was grown
> To a man's full vehemence, there was fixed in me
> A will to know the sap of life, a will
> To live ungoverned by the prudent hands

That are instruction. I watched this king and all of you
Spending the marrowy bounty of your days
In lean and patchy argument, as who
Should bear this right or that, who carry in
And who go laden forth, what gain should be
Marked for this trading, what forfeiture for that,
How should the tithes be reckoned, should those ships
Be chartered so, divided so the spoils
Of each man's labour. And I sickened then
For a state should foster in a man the will
For life not netted in these prudencies.
I saw life simple, and you peopled it
With idiot ghosts that would not let me rest
Till I too mouthed it, and denied myself.

Thus Narros declares himself a Georgian, in violent revolt against the Victorian ideals of Phane. Life is not the simple affair that he believes, nor are Phane's values quite as baseless and useless as he thinks. Yet he embodies the eternal rightness of youth, which must clear the ground before it can rebuild. Man should not and cannot build for all time. Each generation must construct its own spiritual habitation of the conventions and social ideals that fit its own use. What is good and worthy will not perish utterly, but what is ill-contrived must make place for the work of younger hands. So it goes on from age to age. Unfortunately in the process of demolition the good often perishes with the bad and the pessimists never cease to wring their hands over the disastrous iconoclasm of youth and to lament the good old times. Narros and Phane symbolize the struggle of youth and age, and each eventually discovers that he does not hold fate in his hand. Phane is finally overwhelmed by the reinforced powers of his insurgent people; and Narros losing Shubia achieves only a ruined glory. The dramatist holds no brief for either of the combatants. He enables each to present his case and shows with skill and subtlety the strength and weakness of both sides. Phane strives to keep back the inexorable tide of human progress and is eventually destroyed. Narros, reaching for an unreal and unrealizable ideal, grasps only disappointment. If he is, in his parting words, to make live again the beauty of Shubia it will be only when he has learned, like the

blighted poet Alastor, that true life is to be attained only in service.

The play deals mainly with an idea, and its emotional quality is overshadowed and overpowered by the philosophic. The characters act and speak but they lack dramatic vitality. In *The Storm* (1915), a short tragedy in verse, the characterization is still weak. In this striking, and in some respects powerful, little piece Mr. Drinkwater follows the tendency we have already noticed of seeking simplicity but intensity of passion in humble, rustic conditions. The play recalls the method which Mr. Wilfrid Gibson has used so effectively in his semi-dramatic pieces such as those in *Daily Bread*. It evokes the poignant qualities of the life of the poor,—simple and unregarded but made grand by its contact with the awful yet magnificent forces of nature. The tragedy is a conflict, but a conflict in which the issue is foreknown. It is the everlasting struggle of man with the vast, destroying power of nature. Alice symbolizes the indestructible hope which is man's strongest weapon in this grim fight. Old Sarah sees nothing but death in the strength and fury of the storm. The falling snow is to her the shroud in which a hostile heaven will assuredly wrap the shepherd. Yet Alice refuses to weaken her hope for her husband's safety. Not even the anger of the storm or the destroying pessimism of old Sarah can shake her faith in life. When at length the band of rescuers return unsuccessful they need speak no word. Alice reads their looks and is crushed by quiet grief.

The central idea of the awfulness of nature is heightened by the very skilful introduction of a young, lusty tourist. He seeks shelter in this afflicted cottage, but he is unconscious of the great struggle which is going on in the soul of the waiting wife. To him the storm is something of an adventure: it is certainly exhilarating to struggle manfully through the snow. Thus nature appears to one who touches it as the Stranger does. But to the poor who live in perpetual strife with nature it is a dire thought that any can find admiration for this awful engine of death.

Alice. The storm is drenched with treachery and sin—
It is not good to praise it.
* * * * * * *
young man, do you know this night
Is eating through my bones into the marrow,
And creeping round my brain till thought is dead,
And making my heart the oldest thing of any ?

Mr. Drinkwater has a vein of irony which is to be seen in this play, but is still more evident in *The God of Quiet*, a somewhat elusive little play produced in 1916, and in $X=0$ (1917). The latter play is clearly influenced by the Great War. It presents pointedly the fact which has burned itself into the consciousness of humanity—the senselessness of the appalling waste of human life through war. The chief participants in this play are four young soldiers, two Trojans and two Greeks. But they might as well be called English and German or Italian and Austrian. All are men of intellect and promise. Potentially they are valuable members of society, but their skill and ingenuity are directed not to social progress but to perfecting devices for destroying each other. Pronax creeps to the walls of Troy and kills Capys unawares. Making his way back to his tent he finds his comrade dead. Ilus, who has done this deed, with swift stealth returns to the wall, but to his signal Capys can make no answer. The play vibrates with the anger that the calamity of the nations called forth. It is a very short piece, beautiful, bitter, and true. The four young men were all ardent souls, palpitating with life, burning to enjoy and to create beauty ; men powerful to make the world better and more lovely. There is no hate in their hearts.

Great kings may hate,
And priests may thunder hate, and grey-beard prophets
May cry again to those who cry their hate
* * * * * * *
But not for us this envy. It is ours
Merely to die, or give the death that these
Out of their hatred or indifference will.

Here again the philosophic idea is evident and dominates the dramatic quality. The characterization is not very strong, but it is adequate for so short a piece. Mr. Drinkwater

has succeeded in dramatizing with intensity but with bitterness the pity and the folly of war.

All Mr. Drinkwater's early work is interesting and some of it is notable, but it was with the production of *Abraham Lincoln* in 1918 that he leaped into fame as a dramatist. Staged first at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, with which he had for some years been in close contact and where his earlier plays had been produced, it was soon taken to London ; and although it was played in a somewhat remote theatre in Hammersmith it held the public for more than a year. Since then it has had another run in London and has toured widely.

Part of its success was undoubtedly due to the topical nature of the subject and the fact that the active co-operation in Europe of the forces of the United States at the time of its appearance directed the popular gaze towards America and the circumstances of the greatest war she had waged in modern times. With great aptness Mr. Drinkwater exploited problems of the Great War in the persons of Mrs. Goliath Blow, the insensitive, fire-eating wife of a profiteer, and Mrs. Otherly, a gentle soul pained not only by the loss of her son but by the horror of war in all its forms. These characters serve as dramatic foils to Lincoln, who in conversation with them sets forth the clear faith which guided him through the years of struggle. Hatred of war pervaded his whole being, but he saw that in an imperfect world there might be a worse alternative. So, despite his dislike of force, he is brought to use the weapon of force. During the days that followed Lincoln had to hold a high path on a dangerous crest between two dangers—the baser forces which tended to drag the war down to the level of hate, and the infirmity of purpose which, whether springing from high-minded abhorrence of war or reflecting mere lack of staying power, sapped the will to win. The play came at a time when the whole English nation was striving to keep its footing on this difficult way and it consequently struck a chord in the common heart.

The play is however more than an echo of topical emotions

and problems. It is in the first place a new and interesting experiment in constructive technique. In the second place it is a worthy attempt to study a great human character. Although the play may justly be called an experiment, it shows affinity to a very old method. We find the same constructive principle in medieval and Tudor plays. In form *Abraham Lincoln* is a chronicle. Certain salient and significant events in a man's life are shown. The characters are for the most part actual people known to history: only a very few fictitious persons are introduced. But the play is not primarily historical. The dramatist's concern is less with events than with character; or rather with events in so far as they reveal or mould character. Abandoning the conventional organization of a play into acts and scenes Mr. Drinkwater shows us a sequence of six scenes spread over a period of five years. We see the strong, simple man in his plain home at Springfield. We see him at White House, President of the United States of America. We witness his determination to face the perils of war rather than compromise his faith. We watch him in the suspense and anxiety and pain to which years of civil war subjected him. We are with him at the consummation of victory. Last of all we witness his assassination in the moment of acclamation by a grateful people.

This straggling series of vital events is linked together by lyrical intermezzos. The two Chroniclers, who serve the purpose of Chorus, explain the action and give it point, and they help to carry the imagination over the gulf of time that may separate consecutive scenes. But the play is bound together not merely by such adventitious bonds. It has an organic unity which depends on the central figure of Lincoln. The play sets out to show us "a man's character." As the Chroniclers point out truly:

> This is the wonder, always, everywhere—
> Not that vast mutability which is event,
> The pits and pinnacles of change,
> But man's desire and valiance that range
> All circumstance, and come to port unspent.

Incident is of secondary importance. It is of the spirit of man that drama is made.

> But the ardours that they bear,
> The proud and invincible motions of character—
> These—these abide.

The play is a magnificent picture of struggle: it is a great canvas on which we see outspread the conflict of man with circumstance. First he struggles within himself to attain his principle, and then he does battle to maintain it. His sure strength may be stigmatized as stubbornness, but we see that it springs from a higher source. His calm poise which seems so easily secure is preserved only by constant and unflinching energy of purpose.

There is a very long list of *dramatis personæ*, and the playwright has given them all in their degree real vitality. Even Mrs. Goliath Blow and Mrs. Otherly, who are in a sense only pegs for ideas, have life. But all the characters, indeed the whole play, are dominated by the overtopping personality of Lincoln. Everything is directed to enhance the picture of Lincoln's soul. We are shown the great qualities for which he is chosen to lead the American people and we watch those qualities growing under the stress of circumstance. His sureness of touch, his certainty of judgement increase, but increase of strength brings with it no hardening of spirit. On the contrary, as Lincoln becomes more self-dependent and more self-confident his heart mellows to a warmer compassion. As the years pass his belief in the rightness of the war is confirmed, but at the same time he grows more determined that it shall be waged without malice and hate, and with an ultimate purpose of reconciliation and clemency.

Such a lofty ideal can be reached and held only by a man of lofty soul. We watch this great man slowly and painfully climb his upward path to the mountain top. His companions stumble by the way. This one falls off through weakness, that one treacherously would hold back the climber. He attains, but on the heights he is alone. The tragic quality is to be found partly in the greatness

of Lincoln but still more in his utter loneliness of spirit. A man of yearning sympathy he finds himself raised to a point where he must be friendless. But if on the mountain top the soul is lonely, it is rewarded by a rare vision. It is clearness of vision that makes Lincoln so simply great. Like Moses he looked upon the Promised Land but in the high place of God's choosing he was alone.

> Lorsque mon peuple souffre, ou qu'il faut des lois,
> J'élève mes regards, votre esprit me visite ;
> La terre alors chancelle et le soleil hésite,
> Vos anges sont jaloux et m'admirent entre eux.—
> Et cependant, Seigneur, je ne suis pas heureux ;
> Vous m'avez fait vieillir puissant et solitaire,
> Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre ! [1]

In so far as Mr. Drinkwater has refused to follow the conventional tragic method he has in some respects disarmed criticism. The play ends with the assassination of Lincoln by Booth. Whether or not Lincoln's death did in fact proceed inevitably from what he was and did is immaterial, but certainly we are not persuaded here that it results of dramatic necessity. This undoubtedly weakens the tragic effect which is so well maintained up to a point. Yet it is hard to say what else the dramatist could have done to make his ending more tragically satisfying. But even if the dénouement is weak the play is made of great human, tragic stuff. That it could not be consistently great tragedy is largely the fault of history. If he had dared to wrench fact—as he has in other details—Mr. Drinkwater might have succeeded in ending the drama with greater effect.

In *Oliver Cromwell* (1922) Mr. Drinkwater has followed the same method as in *Abraham Lincoln*. Again he adopts the processional device of the pageant. History files past behind a curtain as it were, and now and again the curtain is lifted and we are allowed to see and examine. The play consists of eight scenes and covers a period of fifteen years, and we are given glimpses—vivid glimpses, it is true—of great moments in Cromwell's life. Again Mr. Drinkwater

[1] Alfred de Vigny, *Moise*.

perceives rightly that the dramatist is concerned more with human character than with the pageant of history, and he chooses for our view events and situations for the insight which they give into Cromwell's character. In *Abraham Lincoln* he succeeds in giving a very vivid picture of his great man, but success is not achieved so completely here. It may be that the period covered by the play is too long, or that too much extraneous material is introduced ; but the effect is a raggedness and blurring of outline which rob the piece of dramatic force.

In *Abraham Lincoln* the flow of the play is uninterrupted by side issues. Even Mrs. Goliath Blow and Mrs. Otherly, or the old negro Douglass, are all dramatically useful in showing up the character of the hero. But the charming element introduced by Cromwell's old mother, and the love episode of his daughter and Henry Ireton are not altogether helpful. The main cause of weakness is the lack of connection. The scenes do not hang together of themselves and the dramatist refrains from using the device of chorus links which is so effective in *Abraham Lincoln.*

We have criticized the dénouement of *Abraham Lincoln.* Here again Mr. Drinkwater is in a difficulty which history imposes on him. Sudden and violent death is some help to the writer of historical tragedy, but the dramatist finds no such convenient circumstance to help him to close Cromwell's life. The result is that *Oliver Cromwell* is in no sense tragic. The dramatist does not design it as tragedy, but he does design it as a very serious play. *Abraham Lincoln* is essential, though unconventional, tragedy. This play is a sober picture of a strong, conscientious man battling with great political difficulties. Cromwell's difficulties were no whit less serious than Lincoln's, but in *Oliver Cromwell* the quality of conflict, which is such effective material for tragedy, is less obvious than in *Abraham Lincoln.* The play is a study of spiritual endurance rather than of conflict. Consequently, so far as it is concerned with the soul of Cromwell, it has a static rather than a dynamic appearance. As history did not provide him with a dramatic end to

Cromwell's career the dramatist borrows the conventional atmosphere of tragic ending from outside. The death of Charles I., which is really extraneous, is utilized to enhance the effect of the end; and in the final scene we have the Protector by his aged mother's bedside closing the play with a prayer which in reality he uttered on his own death-bed.

In both plays Mr. Drinkwater shows his great interest in the idea of freedom. With an eminently English and almost puritanical earnestness he studies the tenacity of two of the greatest champions of constitutional liberty. The subject is serious, the men in whom he embodies the idea are serious, and the treatment is serious. This is true despite the subtle touches of humour which relieve the solemnity of Lincoln. The plays are eminently philosophic: they embody a distinct point of view, an outlook on life. Yet they are not didactic in the same sense as are some of the plays which we have considered, plays, for instance, such as Mr. Shaw's. The didactic drama of modern times has been emphatically critical, although the criticism it conveys is not always destructive. If Mr. Drinkwater is didactic it is only by implication. And is not all great art implicitly didactic? To say that his work is philosophic is not to invalidate the statement that he is a constructive dramatist. In that sense he has a quality essential to poetry and to that extent his work is comparable among modern dramatists with that of Mr. Masefield. Where he falls short in poetic equipment is in the fact that his emotions and imagination are subordinate to his intellect. He has imagination and he has deep emotions, but both are general rather than particular. It is obvious that no one without vivid human sympathy could have depicted the character of Abraham Lincoln, but one feels that it is sympathy with mankind at large. It was said of an ardent reformer that he loved man rather than men. That is the impression that Mr. Drinkwater gives in his work. His work is constructive of human character, but it is human character embodying great principles. It is as if these men were created deductively rather than inductively. They seem to proceed from and to typify ideas rather than to grow

from the little emotions and trivial acts which constitute the lives of men and women.

In *Mary Stuart* Mr. Drinkwater has again taken an historical theme. In this play he has abandoned the method of showing a chronological sequence, and in the first form of the play (1921) the whole was concentrated into a single act proceeding from an Induction. The compression is too drastic and the play lacks an adequate end. Just as in his other historical plays which we have studied, the incompleteness is largely due to the facts of history; but in this play the case is made worse by the limitation to a single act. Mr. Drinkwater was apparently conscious of this weakness. The play was produced in its one-act form in America, but when it appeared in London (1922) it had been expanded into two acts. Extension has improved it materially, but still it lacks dramatic completeness.[1]

What is especially noteworthy in *Mary Stuart* is the handling of human nature. Especially in the character of the Queen we recognize a deeper insight into the human heart. Mary is not merely the embodiment of an idea or the personification of abstract qualities: she is a woman compact of sensations and emotions. The play as a whole is less successful than its immediate predecessors, but it seems to indicate that Mr. Drinkwater is advancing towards a fuller capacity to mould the human stuff out of which great drama must be made. Even from this play he has not been able to banish ideas. Mary's relation to her lovers illustrates a certain problem of human love. Hers was the case, according to Mr. Drinkwater's thesis, of those passionate women who "are sometimes destroyed finding no man who can know all that they have to give." The Induction is a conversation between a wise old man and a young man whose wife is not single in her love for him. The idea is set forth in the Induction which serves as an exposition of the story of Mary Stuart. In fact the drama of which Mary is the centre is an illustration of the truth which the old man

[1] The author tells us that the two-act version is virtually the original form which for certain reasons was compressed for the first production.

wishes to inculcate. In this way the play, although in some respects more simply human, shows affinity to its more philosophic forerunners.

The contrivance of the Induction is interesting. The two men are talking in a house in Edinburgh. From the window Holyrood Palace can be seen. Old Andrew Boyd has a large portrait of Mary Stuart hanging on his wall. He is a devoted admirer of the hapless Queen. In his conversation with John Hunter he cites the case of Mary as bearing on the domestic problem that faces his young friend. In his impatience Hunter exclaims: "Mary Stuart can tell me nothing I say." A dress rustles on the terrace outside and Mary Stuart appears at the window. "Boy, I can tell you everything." Then the twentieth century, its people and happenings melt away. Boyd and Hunter and the room vanish and the drama of Mary unrolls. The method reminds one of Sir James Barrie's devices or the still bolder construction of *Melloney Holtspur*. It is another significant sign of that tendency, which we have already noted, to reach out to the spirit world beyond the limits of matter and of sense.

Mr. Drinkwater is still experimenting and progressing. It is not easy to see in what direction he is moving, but he shows a healthy vitality and there are reasons for hoping that he will make further and greater contributions to English drama.[1]

[1] *Robert E. Lee* appeared when this book was in proof—unfortunately too late for comment.

CHAPTER XX

MORE POETS

We have noticed the very marked poetic tendency of the latest dramatic developments. There are a few writers still to be considered in this connection. All of them are poets and it is significant that none of them has yet succeeded in completely capturing theatrical success. The first of them, Lord Dunsany, has gone some way towards it ; but Flecker, Mr. Bottomley and Mr. Abercrombie are still dramatists of the study.

1. DUNSANY

Lord Dunsany has been writing plays for many years and not a few have been produced since *The Glittering Gate* was staged at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in 1909. In fact most have been produced, either in Ireland, England or America, but with one exception they have failed to command a wide public. The reason is not far to seek. Lord Dunsany is an artist of exquisite fancy and delicate execution, but his work is so subtle and elusive that it requires a peculiarly sympathetic reception. Lord Dunsany maintains one side of the early tradition of the Irish dramatic revival. His mystical sense of beauty, his use of the supernatural, and the lyrical beauty of his diction show his artistic kinship with Mr. Yeats. He has however transplanted his drama from his native Ireland to the gorgeous East. Retaining the romantic glamour of an Irish imagination, he has caught something of the bright splendour of ancient Egypt and

Assyria and has there found a pose of oriental impassivity under which he can cloak his enigmatic philosophy.

Although his medium is not metrical the outlook and form of his work are always poetic. He holds high the function of the poet as the detached thinker and the fashioner of jewels of rare beauty. This attitude of detachment is perhaps more apparent than real, but it undoubtedly prevents his work from coming into close contact with the conditions of ordinary life. Mr. Masefield has shown how a dramatist may distil beauty from the simple flowers of the common highway of humanity: Lord Dunsany extracts the essence of the exquisite creations of the hot-house. It is no use to ask him for realism or pictures of common life. He is not concerned with them. He prefers commerce with the fictions of his own luxuriant imagination. It is foolish to drag these down to earth and attempt to measure them by matter-of-fact criteria. They are not amenable to such standards. He is like the little girl in his own play, *The Golden Doom*, who sings her song of the purple bird which she saw "go up against the sky." "Birds aren't purple," protests the prosaic Boy. "My bird was," replies the Girl. There is nothing further to be said. Lord Dunsany's birds are also purple, and there is an end of the matter. If you cannot see purple birds or do not like them, so much the worse for you. But your remedy is quite obvious: you can leave those who do see and like them to take their pleasure by themselves. As purple birds have not yet become the vogue, Lord Dunsany's drama is not yet popular.

Lord Dunsany's work, with all its delicacy, has a grotesque, not to say grim, quality. It recalls the cunningly carved and terrifying ivory images of Chinese art. Beneath the exquisite craftsmanship of the oriental artist there often lurks a spirit of inhuman cruelty. Lord Dunsany shows the unswerving stroke of retribution and adds to the grimness by the grin on the face of the executioner. In *The Laughter of the Gods* he depicts frivolity and irreligion engulfed to the accompaniment of divine merriment. In *The Queen's Enemies* we see a royal lady of ancient Egypt luring her

enemies to sup with her in a subterranean temple. She eats and drinks and makes merry with them, and then drowns them in the waters of the Nile with which the chamber can be flooded at will. Grim justice touched with grotesquerie is seen in *The Gods of the Mountain.* With impious cunning a band of beggars impersonate the Gods who indwell vast squatting images of jade on a far-off mountain. They succeed in imposing themselves on a city and receive the adoration and entertainment due to the Gods. But they cannot impose on the Gods themselves, who come in the shape of the seven great green idols to work vengeance. They strike terror into the hearts of the Beggars whom they turn into stone like themselves. Certain incredulous folk had doubted the divinity of the Beggars. The irony of the ending is in the conversion of these sceptics who when they find the Beggars turned to stone believe at last that they were really divine. A similar irony marks the close of *The Golden Doom* and the retributive ending of *King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior.* But none of the plays attains such a refinement of irony as his first piece, *The Glittering Gate.* We see two burglars trying to force their way into heaven. At length the more enterprising of the two succeeds in picking the lock of the glittering gate. Slowly they heave open the great doors and instead of heaven they find—nothing, just a vast abyss of vacuity.

In a few of his plays Lord Dunsany has taken a scene from modern civilization ; but the essential qualities are the same. *The Lost Top Hat,* a delightful, perverse trifle, in which philosophy and satire are embedded side by side, takes place in a street in the West End of London. In *A Night at an Inn* Lord Dunsany gets nearest to the externals of a modern realistic drama, but it is marked by the quaintness and grimness of his eastern themes. The awful retribution with which it closes resembles the vengeance on impiety in *The Gods of the Mountain.* Some English adventurers in the East have stolen the single eye of an idol. It is a vast jewel. The priests of the ravished god have tracked them to England ; some of their accomplices they have killed.

We are shown the final struggle in which oriental cunning is pitted against European cleverness, and defeated. One by one the avenging priests are tricked and slain. Just as the robbers think that at last they have won immunity a horrible noise announces the arrival of the God, groping his way, for he is blind for lack of his single eye. He wreaks terrible vengeance, recovers the jewel, and disappears with the sure step of one who can see.

The most considerable play that Lord Dunsany has written is *If*, which is the only one that has achieved anything like theatrical success. It had a comparatively long run in London in 1921. At first it bids fair to be a play of modern London, but the mysterious creeps in, and in the end it turns out to be as thoroughly oriental as usual. We have noticed a frequent tendency even amongst more prosaic dramatists to introduce supernaturalism into their work in recent years. From Lord Dunsany we expect this, so that is not surprising when by the agency of a magic talisman John Beal is enabled to go back to a point of time in his early life and catch a certain train which he had once missed. The result is that his whole life is different and he finds himself a petty king in the mountains of Persia, lapped in oriental luxury, invested with princely power, and finally deposed and cast adrift. It is all a dream life and in the end he finds himself back in his suburban villa and only a day has passed since he left his home. In its mysterious blend of past and present *If* recalls the bold technique of *Mary Rose* and *Melloney Holtspur* and other plays of the same type which we have noticed already.

From the short account we have given of Lord Dunsany's work, it should be clear that he is very far removed from the bourgeois realists and the dramatists of ideas. He has his philosophy, but it is essentially the philosophy of a poet and not of a sociologist. His is an art which depends primarily on an escape from actuality to a world of fancy. As in the ordinary world good and evil exist there, but the beauty is always quaint and the ugliness grotesque. But it is a poet's world ; and the language, rich in lovely imagery

and satisfying to the ear by its subtle rhythm, could spring from nothing but the spirit of poetry. Nevertheless his work as a whole is so remote in mood and manner that it is doubtful whether it can ever find appreciation from more than a small, select audience.

2. FLECKER

A word must be said with regard to the very striking play, *Hassan*, which the poet Flecker left among his papers when he died in 1915 and which was published in 1922. In many respects it recalls Lord Dunsany's work. Like much of Flecker's other work it is oriental in its setting. The action centres in an adventure in Bagdad of the Caliph Haroun Al Raschid. It is a grotesque mixture of eastern splendour and grimness. It contains exquisite lyrical passages and scenes of passionate beauty ; it also shows the most gruesome display of diabolical cruelty and torture carried to the finest point of inhuman ingenuity.

It is a long play in five acts and whether it will carry its own weight on the stage has still to be proved. The lavish beauty of the scenes and the language, manipulated by a skilful producer, may triumph.[1] But the play suffers seriously from lack of definite motive. Take it to pieces and you cannot fail to be struck by the beauty of the parts. Regard it as a whole and you wonder whither it all tends. It opens as pleasant poetic buffoonery. Wonder follows wonder, and we are not surprised to find the great Caliph being hoisted to an upper window in a basket in search of adventure, or to know that our old fat friend, the comically lovelorn confectioner, Hassan, has been promoted by the Caliph to a position second only to that of the Vizier. We are however surprised when this pleasant nonsense gives place to high seriousness and the play ends as a magnificently tragic story of All for Love or the World Well Lost. Rafi, the King of the Beggars, and Pervaneh, the slave and his lover,

[1] *Hassan* was produced (somewhat abridged) in October, 1923, with remarkable success.

are given the awful choice of utter separation or one day of love and then death by torture. In the end love triumphs and we almost witness the horrible torments to which they are subjected by the cold, relentless cruelty of Haroun Al Raschid.

If it were not that his name is the title of the play we should scarcely realize the importance of Hassan. The absurdly simple creature, lifted to the height of royal favour and dashed from it when he dares to protest against the Caliph's cruelty, embodies all the gentleness which the tyrant lacks. His punishment is to be forced to look upon the scene of torture. His tender heart is broken and he leaves the hated city of the tyrant with Ishak, the poet, who can no longer sing for the cruel Haroun. Together they decide to join the departing pilgrims and traverse the desert on the Golden Journey to Samarkand.

Many episodes, of which the relevance is not always clear, are introduced. A love adventure of the hapless Hassan begins as a strange medley of erotic farce, develops seriously, and yet is never wholly consonant with the main plot. The last scene but one of the play shows us the ghosts of the murdered lovers and of others who have suffered under the tyranny. We hear them conversing weirdly on the final condition of departed spirits. But the purport of their talk is scarcely clearer than the reason for their introduction.

Yet, with all its shortcomings, the play is a notable effort and shows a great imaginative reach. Flecker died before he had gained much dramatic experience and it is quite conceivable that had he lived the more obvious flaws might have been remedied. The vehicle is prose, but the language glows with the real spirit of poetry. In sound and substance alike it is the work of a poet. Although he lacked the technical skill of Lord Dunsany, Flecker had, even in fuller measure, the best creative qualities which we have seen in Lord Dunsany's work. If he could write *Hassan* as a first effort one feels that with sufficient opportunity Flecker had it in him to make very great drama. Equally strong is the

impression that if he had become a dramatist he would nevertheless always have remained a poet.

3. BOTTOMLEY

Mr. Gordon Bottomley is not merely a poet in thought, but he also uses verse as his medium. His plays have been so little acted that one has come to think of him less as dramatist than as poet. This is not altogether unjust, as in some respects the dramatic quality of his work is overshadowed by the purely poetic. Nevertheless he has undoubted dramatic power, and the fact that his plays are so little acted is chiefly to be accounted for by the unfortunate fact that poetry is well-nigh banished from the modern stage. Mr. Bottomley's work, even his plays which are not notable for their dramatic strength, are no less suitable for the stage than many plays of Mr. Yeats. If there was in Dublin an audience for the poetic drama of Mr. Yeats one cannot say that Mr. Bottomley's work is unsuitable for production. In fact when they have been produced they have made a powerful appeal; but unfortunately they have been rarely seen on the stage, and several have not been produced.

Like the two poetic dramatists already discussed in this chapter Mr. Bottomley is eminently a romanticist. Like them he infuses into his work the mysterious beauty of a rich imagination. He employs the supernatural to produce his weird effects. But he differs from them in scene and atmosphere. Instead of the bright oriental colouring and clear light of Lord Dunsany and Flecker's work we have the mists of a Celtic twilight. His genius is essentially northern and the atmosphere is sunless and grey. The only brightness is that of a cold, white morn.

In *The Crier by Night*, which was written in 1900 and first produced in the United States in 1916, Mr. Bottomley blends the wistful pathos of ancient Ireland with the harshness of Norse saga. The whole is shrouded in glamour, and the dramatic effect, although tense, is effected mainly by means of suggestion. This short piece is full of passionate force,

yet we are conscious of vast, unseen, but dimly perceived, spaces surrounding the little hut where the struggle of souls is fought out with tragic swiftness.

In his second play, *Midsummer Eve* (1905), the atmosphere is again weirdly dim, but it is the one play in which we feel the spirit to be English. It is full of mystery, and the end is inexplicably supernatural. The queer happenings take place " a long time ago " we are told. But the old barn, redolent of the June hay harvest, the rolling landscape, the rich orchards and luxuriant foliage, the smell of cattle, the lads and lasses themselves are all unmistakably English. Mr. Bottomley is attracted irresistibly by the night, but generally they are cold, inhospitable and northern nights. The action of this play passes in the teeming warmth of a June evening and night when it is a relief to be in the open air or at most to suffer the confinement of a lofty barn. The play contains much verbal beauty and richness of poetic imagery, but the motive is intangible and the impression made is vague. It succeeds through the medium of print in producing a wonderful sense of atmosphere, but it is doubtful whether there is enough dramatic substance to support stage representation.

The most considerable of Mr. Bottomley's earlier plays which have undergone the test of production is *King Lear's Wife*, written 1911-13 and first staged in 1915. The play attempts to reconstruct the earlier life of King Lear. We are shown the pitiful end of his wife, Hygd, who died chiefly of a broken heart. Her husband has tired of her and gives his love to a designing menial, Gormflaith. We see Goneril, an unconquered virgin, high-spirited, athletic, fond of hunting, and with a heart full of hate for her father which is inspired by her ardent love for her abused mother. The much younger sister Cordeil is a pampered child obviously spoiled by an indulgent father. Regan is mentioned, but she does not appear.

If only as a speculation on the conditions which might give rise to the almost incredible opening of Shakespeare's *King Lear* the play is interesting. It was perhaps natural

to depict Lear in very dark hues, but it was an act of boldness to stigmatize Cordeil and dress Goneril in virtue. But the play must stand or fall by its own merits. There can be no question as to the power of characterization which it shows, and unlike some other of Mr. Bottomley's plays it does not lack movement and intensity of human interest. At the same time the central tragic figure of the dying Queen is scarcely great enough to support the tragedy. Lear himself is too despicable. Gormflaith is merely a masterful strumpet. The Queen is an intensely pathetic figure, but her death is only the final extinction of a poor rush-light. The most grandly conceived figure is Goneril, who is the instrument of fate bringing retribution on the sinful woman who has wronged her mother by robbing her of the King's love and fidelity. Spurred by her anger and her love Goneril murders the wretched Gormflaith. Lear himself is paid terribly by learning that the woman for whom he has bartered his soul was a common trull and that whilst sinning with him she was also satisfying her lust with another man. It is a dark story and it closes with devastating bitterness amidst the squabbling of the two women who are preparing the body of the poor injured Queen for burial. Their only interest is in the jewellery and clothes of which they can rob the corpse.

In two other plays Mr. Bottomley has taken an early British theme. *Britain's Daughter* deals with the futile attempt of the Britons to stem the tide of Roman invasion. It lacks dramatic force, though in poetic qualities it is not altogether deficient. Far more striking is *Gruach*. Again Mr. Bottomley goes behind a Shakespearian play. Gruach is Lady Macbeth. We see this wild girl about to be married to her cousin, Conan, the young Thane of Fortingall. There is nothing to prevent the match, and Gruach submits to a union with a man to whom she can give neither love nor respect. On the eve of the wedding a young warrior arrives, a royal emissary who has lost his way and seeks a night's shelter. We watch the mutual attraction and captivation. Before dawn Gruach and the warrior, Macbeth, flee together.

In none of his plays, *King Lear's Wife* not excepted, has Mr. Bottomley achieved such vivid dramatic effects. Too often Mr. Bottomley's work is static, and, whilst atmosphere is produced with unquestionable skill, incident and motive are nebulous. In *Gruach* he has not failed to create atmosphere and to convey a sense of the lonely remoteness of a primitive Scottish fastness and its effect on the spirit of a young girl pulsating with life and desire. But furthermore, the characterization is definite, the play is full of movement of which the direction is clear, and passion and event are matched to create real drama.

Because Mr. Bottomley writes in verse and has published his work somewhat fastidiously there is an inclination to regard his drama as esoteric. It is unfortunately true that modern fashion tends to close the popular ear to verse drama, but in reality his work is close to the folk mind. The passion and event that he depicts are of a primitive quality, and the attitude to life which he presents is great in its elemental simplicity. Mr. Bottomley takes us far indeed from the circumstances of our time, but he is no antiquary who reconstructs a bygone age by an assiduous application of local and historical colour. His world is the region which poets have made and which we can visit only by the aid of imagination. Yet in all essential qualities it is a world of real men, elemental men whom only the poet can create. It is this elemental quality which puts Mr. Bottomley's work into touch with the spirit of true folk art. The theatre to-day is divorced from the folk, but there are signs of a change. If, as now seems possible, drama regains contact with the folk, then Mr. Bottomley's work will find a more cordial welcome than it has so far received.

4. ABERCROMBIE

Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie is another writer whose work is poetic in both substance and form. Yet it differs widely from Mr. Bottomley's. Mr. Bottomley, although close to the folk spirit, invests his work with a remoteness which

carries us far from actuality. Mr. Abercrombie however is in touch with the lives of the people. Like Mr. Masefield in *The Tragedy of Nan* or Mr. Drinkwater in *The Storm* he sets his plays amidst the lives of rustic society and seizes upon the dramatic material which he finds in simple rural conditions. He aims at doing for drama what George Eliot and Mr. Hardy have done for prose fiction.

He employs verse as his vehicle, but it must be admitted that his rhythms are occasionally harsh to the ear and difficult to catch. What is important is that he swells the current of drama which is essentially poetic. His plays lack the gripping passion and dramatic energy of Synge or Mr. Masefield's rustic drama, but their simplicity and honesty provide a happy contrast to the narrow realism of the critics of bourgeois society.

Mr. Abercrombie has not yet written much drama. *Deborah*, his most considerable play, was published in 1913; and since then he has printed four short plays, of which three have been performed. In *Deborah* he has shown his ability to create stirring drama which flows from clearly defined characterization and powerful incident: parts of the final scene grip the imagination and the emotions strongly. But in this play, and still more noticeably in some of the shorter pieces, there is a tendency to talk rather than to do. The most lively action in the one act plays is to be found in a serio-comic piece, *The End of the World* (1914), in which the rustic heart is laid bare.

If Mr. Abercrombie has not yet achieved anything of great merit, his work is highly significant of an important tendency of modern drama. We have seen the strong lead given by Synge in Ireland and Mr. Masefield in England, both of them realizing the possibility of creating great drama from the simple material of folk life. Mr. Abercrombie is working the same lode, which has already proved to be rich in quality and which coming dramatists may find to be well-nigh inexhaustible in quantity.

IN CONCLUSION

No single man has done more to inspire the modern dramatic revival than Ibsen; but, as we have already said, Ibsen has been only half understood by his followers. Ibsen's great discovery was that real drama was not incompatible with modern social conditions. The writers of comedy had been content to utilize conditions of contemporary society as dramatic material; but for tragedy dramatists had in the past sought remoteness as a means of achieving the grandeur and elevation proper to tragedy. Occasionally men had attempted to create tragedy out of contemporary life. Such plays as *Arden of Feversham* and the still more remarkable *Woman Killed with Kindness* of Thomas Heywood were noteworthy attempts in Shakespeare's day. The vogue of domestic tragedy was a marked tendency in that age, but it produced little of permanent value. The eighteenth century saw a revival of the attempt by men like George Lillo, Edward Moore and Richard Cumberland; but once again it made no great impression and degenerated into sentimental melodrama.

Ibsen however succeeded. The secret of his success was that he realized the basic necessity of greatness in tragic character, even though the setting was commonplace and modern. His contribution was to show that great tragic character did not necessitate remoteness of milieu. In his earlier plays the quality of remoteness is to be found. Kings and queens, and life in ancient times are the material on which he works. Then he discovered that human greatness was not incompatible with an everyday, modern setting. What his disciples noted was the fact that his drama was realistic and critical of the social conventions of his time; and they directed their own efforts on these lines. In some cases, as we have seen in the course of our study, they succeeded in making great drama. Whenever they were successful it was because they gave their first attention to constructing great human character. More often they forgot this central purpose of drama and occupied themselves with

studying problems arising from the evils of modern social conditions. Sir Arthur Pinero and Mr. Shaw did more than any others to turn English drama in this direction. In a word modern drama has been concerned with the smallness rather than the greatness of human nature.

Comedy is properly concerned with the pettiness of human nature. Folly is its *raison d'être*. In that sense comedy is essentially critical and even destructive. But the greatest form of drama, namely tragedy, must display a positive belief in life. It is true that all tragedy in the end depicts some phase of overt conflict of good and evil, and consequently evil of necessity has its place in tragic art. But eventually the issue of tragedy must be the justification of the greatness of the human spirit. It is the failure to realize this truth that has led to the aberration of so much of modern drama.

Nevertheless the dramatists of yesterday and to-day have done valuable work. They have at least established the relationship of serious drama to modern life. The sterile English drama of the nineteenth century received new life when dramatists, following Ibsen in one respect, drew new vitality from a study of the middle class. A few, as we have seen, have pushed the process still further and are seeking themes and human material in the still simpler life of the labouring folk. Of these Mr. Abercrombie is one: but there are others. Mr. Masefield we have noted in particular in his *Tragedy of Nan*. Mr. Gilbert Cannan is in the current with his two powerful little dramas, *Miles Dixon* (1910) and *Mary's Wedding* (1912), which are based on the rustic life of Northern England. Mr. Wilfrid Gibson, although he does not write specifically for the stage, is making a contribution which is at least semi-dramatic. His short sketches in the volume called *Daily Bread* (1910) and his more sustained effort *Krindlesyke* (1922) are not suited to the theatre: they are too analytic and static. But they are significant of the new tendency to apply dramatic poetry to the treatment of the life of the manual workers. Even writers like Mr. Shaw and Mr. Galsworthy have discovered

the value of utilizing unsophisticated human material, such as cannot be found in the more refined elements of society, as a medium for drama. Mr. Galsworthy has made use of the farming community of Dartmoor in *A Bit o' Love*; and in the uncouth simplicity of Blanco Posnet and the scarce civilized society in which he moves Mr. Shaw has found the substance out of which he has created his most positive contribution to human truth.[1]

This tendency is of the first importance; but it does not follow that no great drama can be made of more sophisticated human material. If that were so the outlook, in view of the spread of education and civilization, would be gloomy. It is however a healthy sign because of the fact of which it is symptomatic. It betokens the desir of dramatists to get at the basic human stuff that lies beneath the surface of social wrappings. They find this easiest where the wrappings are least plentiful and that is in the lives of the folk. They are realizing, consciously or unconsciously, the truth of Wordsworth's doctrine. The present signs of a recrudescence of village life and rural culture, expressing themselves in many forms of communal artistic effort and not least in dramatic activity, encourage the hope that the folk may once again play a part in giving vitality to English drama.

The great central fact is that drama is becoming more positive and constructive. Critical, merely realistic, drama seems to have had its day, at any rate for the present. Realism was a healthy quality in so far as it helped to restore nineteenth century art to reality, but dramatists seem to recognize to-day that there is a limitation to its value. It has been demonstrated obviously that realism is useless as an ultimate aim in drama and it is becoming clear once again that reality may be achieved without its aid. So long as this sense inspires the artist the historical, geographical or social setting of drama matters no whit. What alone is vital is a truthful depiction of human nature and a great

[1] As American drama does not come within the purview of this study only the barest reference is permissible to the very striking work of Mr. Eugene O'Neill. He is establishing, if he has not already established, a reputation as a dramatic interpreter of common life.

conception of human worth. Of all forms of literary art it is poetry which is pre-eminently adapted to this end. Poetry is concerned not with the ephemeral but with the essential and lasting stuff of the human spirit. It is " the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth." Poetry utilizes a medium in which human passions move with least restraint and of its very nature it tends to prevent the intrusion of the irrelevant circumstances of actual life.

There are happy signs which indicate that the direction of English drama to-day is towards poetry. The form may be verse or prose, but the spirit is poetic. It is not to be expected, or hoped, that kinds will be limited. The old *genres* will doubtless continue, but new paths of development are being opened out. The more the better. The drama should meet the needs of all and therefore it should be catholic and draw sustenance from every side of life. Great hope lies in the work of men who in opening out new sources of inspiration are dominated by the poetic impulse. With some, like Lord Dunsany, the imagination may crave for the rich stimulus of the brilliant east; some, like Mr. Bottomley, will turn to the simplicity of a primitive past; others, like Synge, Mr. Masefield and Mr. Abercrombie will find all they need in the lives of the folk. They may write in prose or they may write in verse. But one and all they demand free scope for the imagination and they are all primarily concerned with displaying the human heart. In a word they are poets. If our drama is restored to its old place in the realm of poetry we need have no fears that it will decay, for " Poetry is as immortal as the heart of man."

LIST OF PLAYS

This list is not complete in all cases, but generally all, or almost all, the dramatic works of the author are recorded. Except where otherwise indicated, an attempt has been made to achieve completeness in the case of dramatists treated at length in the text.

Where a play has been produced the date given is that of first performance in a theatre. Dates within brackets are of first publication in printed form.

ABERCROMBIE, LASCELLES.
Deborah (1913).
The Adder, 1913.
The End of the World, 1914.
The Staircase, 1920.
The Deserter (1922).
Phœnix (1923).

BAKER, ELIZABETH (Mrs. J. E. Allaway).
Chains, 1909.
Cupid in Clapham, 1910.
Miss Tassey, 1910.
Edith, 1912.
The Price of Thomas Scott, 1913.
Beastly Pride, 1914.
Over the Garden Wall, 1915.
Partnership, 1917.
Miss Robinson, 1918.

BARKER, H. GRANVILLE.
The Weather Hen (with Berte Thomas), 1899.
The Marrying of Ann Leete, 1901.
Prunella (with L. Housman), 1904.
The Voysey Inheritance, 1905.
Waste, 1907.
The Madras House, 1910.
Rococo, 1911.
Anatol (from A. Schnitzler, *Das Märschen*), 1911.
The Harlequinade (with D. C. Calthrop), 1913.
Vote by Ballot, 1917.
Farewell to the Theatre (1917).
The Secret Life (1923).

BARRIE, J. M.
Becky Sharp, 1891.
Ibsen's Ghost, 1891.
Richard Savage, 1891.
Walker, London, 1892.
Jane Annie, 1893.
The Professor's Love Story, 1894.
The Little Minister, 1897.
The Wedding Guest, 1900.
Quality Street, 1902.
The Admirable Crichton, 1902.
Little Mary, 1903.
Peter Pan, 1904.
Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire, 1905.
Pantaloon, 1905.
Josephine, 1906.
Punch, 1906.
What Every Woman Knows, 1908.

The Twelve Pound Look, 1910.
Old Friends, 1910.
A Slice of Life, 1910.
Rosalind, 1912.
The Legend of Leonora, 1913.
The Adored One, 1913.
The Will, 1913.
Half an Hour, 1913.
Der Tag, 1914.
The New Word, 1915.
Rosy Rapture, 1915.
The Fatal Typist, 1915.
A Kiss for Cinderella, 1916.
Shakespeare's Legacy, 1916.
The Old Lady Shows Her Medals, 1917.
Seven Women (revised version of Act I. of *The Adored One*), 1917.
Dear Brutus, 1917.
Barbara's Wedding (1918).
A Well Remembered Voice, 1918.
La Politesse, 1918.
The Truth About the Russian Dancers, 1920.
Mary Rose, 1920.
Shall We Join the Ladies?, 1922.

BENNETT, E. ARNOLD.
Cupid and Commonsense, 1908.
What the Public Wants, 1909.
The Great Adventure, 1911.
The Honeymoon, 1911.
Milestones (with E. Knoblauch), 1912.
The Title, 1918.
Judith, 1919.
Sacred and Profane Love, 1919.
The Love Match, 1922.

BESIER, R.
Olive Latimer's Husband, 1909.
Don, 1909.
The Crisis, 1910.
Lady Patricia, 1911.
Kings and Queens, 1915.
Kultur at Home, 1916.
Buxell (originally entitled *A Run for His Money*), 1916.
Robin's Father (with Hugh Walpole), 1918.

BOTTOMLEY, GORDON.
The Crier by Night (1902), 1916 (U.S.A.).
Midsummer Eve (1905).
Laodice and Danaë (1909).
The Riding to Lithend (1909).
King Lear's Wife, 1915.
Gruach (1921), 1923.
Britain's Daughter, 1922.

BOUCICAULT, DIONYSIUS L. (?1820-1890).
London Assurance, 1841.
The Colleen Bawn; or, The Brides of Garryowen, 1859 (U.S.A.), 1860 (London).
The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana, 1859 (U.S.A.), 1861 (London).
Arrah-Na-Pogue; or, The Wicklow Wedding, 1864.
The Shaughraun, 1875.

BOYLE, WILLIAM.
The Building Fund, 1905.
The Eloquent Dempsy, 1906.
The Mineral Workers, 1906.
The Love Charm, 1911.
Family Failing, 1912.
The O'Dempsy, 1918.

BRIGHOUSE, HAROLD.
The Doorway, 1909.
Dealing in Futures, 1909.
The Price of Coal, 1909.
The Polygon (later entitled *Graft*), 1911.
The Scaring Off of Teddy Dawson, 1911.
Lonesome-Like, 1911.
Spring in Bloomsbury, 1911.
The Oak Settle, 1912.
The Odd Man Out, 1912.
Little Red Shoes, 1912.
The Game, 1913.
Garside's Career, 1914.
The Northerners, 1914.
The Road to Raebury, 1914.
Followers, 1915.
Converts, 1915.
Hobson's Choice, 1915 (U.S.A.), 1916 (London).
The Clock Goes Round, 1916.
Zack, 1916 (U.S.A.).
The Maid of France, 1917.
The Bantam, V.C., 1919.

CALDERON, GEORGE (1868-1915).
The Fountain, 1909.
The Little Stone House, 1911.

CALDERON, GEORGE—*cont.*
Revolt, 1912.
Geminae, 1913.
Cromwell: Mall o' Monks (1922).
CANNAN, GILBERT.
Miles Dixon, 1910.
James and John, 1910.
The Perfect Widow, 1912.
Mary's Wedding, 1912.
Wedding Presents, 1913.
The Arbour of Refuge, 1913.
A Short Way with Authors, 1913.
CHAMBERS, C. HADDON (1860-1921).
One of Them, 1886.
The Open Gate, 1887.
Captain Swift, 1888.
The Idler, 1890.
The Honourable Herbert, 1891.
The Old Lady, 1892.
The Pipe of Peace, 1892.
John a Dreams, 1894.
The Tyranny of Tears, 1899.
The Awakening, 1901.
The Golden Silence, 1903.
Sir Anthony, 1906.
Passers By, 1911.
The Saving Grace, 1917.
CHAPIN, HAROLD (1886-1915).
Augustus in Search of a Father, 1910.
The Marriage of Columbine, 1910.
The Autocrat of the Coffee Stall, 1911.
The Dumb and the Blind (originally entitled *God and Mrs. Henderson*), 1911.
Muddle Annie, 1911.
Innocent and Annabel, 1912.
Art and Opportunity, 1912.
Elaine, 1912.
Wonderful Grandmamma; or, The Wand of Youth, 1912.
It's the Poor that 'elps the Poor, 1913.
Dropping the Baby, 1914.
Every Man for His Own, 1914.
The Philosopher of Butterbiggins, 1915.
The New Morality, 1920.
The Threshold (1921).
The Well Fitting Dress Coat (in MS.).
CHESTERTON, G. K.
Magic, 1913.
COLUM, PADRAIC.
The Kingdom of Youth, 1902.
The Foleys (1903).
The Saxon Shillin', 1903.
Broken Soil, 1903.
The Land, 1905.
The Fiddler's House (revised version of *Broken Soil*), 1907.
The Miracle of the Corn, 1908. Written by 1904.
Thomas Muskerry, 1910.
The Destruction of the Hostel, 1910.
The Desert, 1910. Later entitled *Mogu the Wanderer*.
The Betrayal, 1913.
DANE, CLEMENCE.
A Bill of Divorcement, 1921.
Will Shakespeare, 1921.
DAVIES, H. H. (1876-1917).
A Dream of Love, 1899.
Fifty Years Ago, 1901.
Mrs. Gorringe's Necklace, 1903.
Cousin Kate, 1903.
Cynthia, 1904.
Captain Drew on Leave, 1905.
The Mollusc, 1907.
Lady Epping's Lawsuit, 1908.
Bevis, 1909.
A Single Man, 1910.
Doormats, 1912.
Outcast, 1914.
DRINKWATER, JOHN.
Cophetua, 1911.
Rebellion, 1914.
The Storm, 1915.
The God of Quiet, 1916.
X=0; A Night of the Trojan War, 1917.
Abraham Lincoln, 1918.
Mary Stuart, 1921 (U.S.A.); revised version (London), 1922.
Oliver Cromwell, 1922.
Robert E. Lee, 1923.
DUNSANY, E. J. M. D. PLUNKETT, BARON.
The Glittering Gate, 1909.

King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior, 1911.
The Gods of the Mountain, 1911.
The Golden Doom, 1912.
The Lost Silk Hat, 1913.
The Tents of the Arabs, 1914 (Paris).
A Night at an Inn, 1916 (U.S.A.), 1917 (London).
The Queen's Enemies, 1916 (U.S.A.).
The Prince of Stamboul, 1918 (U.S.A.),
Fame and the Poet, 1918 (U.S.A.), 1920.
The Laughter of the Gods, 1919 (U.S.A.).
The Murderers, 1919 (U.S.A.).
The Compromise of the King of the Golden Isles, 1920 (U.S.A.).
A Good Bargain, 1920 (U.S.A.).
If Shakespeare Lived To-day, 1920 (U.S.A.).
Cheezo, 1921.
If, 1921.
The Flight of the Queen (1922).

ERVINE, ST. J. G.
Mixed Marriage, 1911.
Compensation, 1911.
The Magnanimous Lover, 1912.
Jane Clegg, 1913.
The Critics, 1913.
The Orangeman, 1913.
John Ferguson, 1915.
The Island of Saints, 1920.
The Wonderful Visit (with H. G. Wells), 1921.
The Ship, 1922.
Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary, 1923.

ESMOND, H. V. (1869-1922).
Rest, 1892.
Bogey, 1895.
The Divided Way, 1895.
One Summer's Day, 1897.
Grierson's Way, 1899.
The Wilderness, 1901.
When We Were Twenty-One, 1901.
The Sentimentalist, 1901.
My Lady Virtue, 1902.
Billy's Little Love Affair, 1903.
The O'Grindles, 1908.
A Young Man's Fancy, 1912.
Eliza Comes to Stay (originally entitled *Sandy and his Eliza*), 1912.
The Dangerous Age (originally entitled *The Dear Fool*, 1913), 1914.
A Kiss or Two (originally entitled *Salad Days*), 1917.
The Law Divine, 1918.
The Terror of Belgrave Square, 1919.
Birds of a Feather, 1920.

FLECKER, J. E.
Hassan (1922), 1923.

GALSWORTHY, JOHN.
The Silver Box, 1906.
Joy, 1907.
Strife, 1909.
Justice, 1910.
The Little Dream, 1911.
The Pigeon, 1912.
The Eldest Son, 1912.
The Fugitive, 1913.
The Mob, 1914.
The Little Man, 1915.
A Bit o' Love, 1915.
The Foundations, 1917.
Defeat, 1920.
The Skin Game, 1920.
The First and the Last, 1921.
Hall-Marked (1921).
The Sun (1921), 1923.
Punch and Go (1921).
A Family Man, 1921.
Loyalties, 1922.
Windows, 1922.

GREGORY, LADY I. A.
Twenty-Five, 1903.
Spreading the News, 1904.
Kincora, 1905.
The White Cockade, 1905.
Hyacinth Halvey, 1906.
The Gaol Gate, 1906.
The Canavans, 1906.
The Jackdaw, 1907.
The Rising of the Moon, 1907.
Dervorgilla, 1907.
The Workhouse Ward, 1908.
Kincora (revised version), 1909.
The Image, 1909.
The Travelling Man, 1910.

Gregory, Lady I. A.—*cont.*
The Full Moon, 1910.
Coats, 1910.
The Deliverer, 1911.
McDarragh's Wife, 1911. Later named *McDonough's Wife*.
The Bogie Men, 1912.
Grania (1912).
Damer's Gold, 1912.
The Wrens, 1914.
Shanwalla, 1915.
The Golden Apple (1916), 1920.
Hanrahan's Oath, 1918.
The Dragon, 1919.
Aristotle's Bellows, 1921.
The Jester (1922).

Grundy, Sydney (1848-1914).
The Snowball, 1879.
A Pair of Spectacles, 1890.
A Fool's Paradise, 1892. (Original version entitled *The Mousetrap*, 1887.)
Sowing the Wind, 1893.
A Bunch of Violets, 1894.
And many more making a total of nearly forty. A large proportion are adaptations from the French.

Hankin, St. John E. C. (1869-1909).
The Two Mr. Wetherbys, 1903.
The Return of the Prodigal, 1905.
The Charity that Began at Home, 1906.
The Cassilis Engagement, 1907.
The Burglar Who Failed, 1908.
The Last of the De Mullins, 1908.
The Constant Lover, 1912. Written 1908.
Thompson (completed by G. Calderon), 1913.

Hastings, B. M.
The New Sin, 1912.
Love, and What Then ?, 1912.
The Tide, 1912.
Advertisement, 1915.
Bed Rock (with Eden Phillpotts), 1916.
A Certain Liveliness, 1919.

Houghton, Stanley (1881-1913).
The Dear Departed, 1908.
Independent Means, 1909.
The Master of the House, 1910.
The Younger Generation, 1910.
Fancy Free, 1911.
Pearls, 1912.
Hindle Wakes, 1912.
The Day of Reckoning (with F. Nasmith), 1912.
Phipps, 1912.
Trust the People, 1913.
The Perfect Cure, 1913.
Ginger, 1913.
The Old Testament and the New, 1914.
The Fifth Commandment, 1914.
Partners, 1915.
The Hillary's (with H. Brighouse), 1915.

Jerrold, D. W. (1803-1857).
Blackeyed Susan ; or, "All in the Downs," 1829.
The Rent Day, 1832.
And upwards of thirty more.

Jones, H. A.
Only Round the Corner, 1878.
Hearts of Oak, 1879.
Harmony Restored, 1879.
Elopement, 1879.
A Clerical Error, 1879.
An Old Master, 1880.
His Wife, 1881.
Home Again, 1881.
A Bed of Roses, 1882.
The Silver King (with H. Herman), 1882.
Breaking a Butterfly—based on H. Ibsen, *A Doll's House* (with H. Herman), 1884.
Chatterton (with H. Herman), 1884.
Saints and Sinners, 1884.
Hoodman Blind (with Wilson Barrett), 1885.
The Lord Harry (with Wilson Barrett), 1885.
The Noble Vagabond, 1886.
Hard Hit, 1887.
Heart of Hearts, 1887.
Wealth, 1889.
The Middleman, 1889.

Judah, 1890.
Sweet Will, 1890.
The Deacon, 1890.
The Dancing Girl, 1891.
The Crusaders, 1891.
The Bauble Shop, 1893.
The Tempter, 1893.
The Masqueraders, 1894.
The Case of Rebellious Susan, 1894.
The Triumph of the Philistines, 1895.
Michael and His Lost Angel, 1896.
The Rogue's Comedy, 1896.
The Physician, 1897.
The Liars, 1897.
The Manœuvres of Jane, 1898.
Carnac Sahib, 1899.
The Lackey's Carnival, 1900.
Mrs. Dane's Defence, 1900.
The Princess's Nose, 1902.
Chance, the Idol, 1902.
Whitewashing Julia, 1903.
Joseph Entangled, 1904.
The Chevaleer, 1904.
The Heroic Stubbs, 1906.
The Hypocrites, 1906.
The Goal, 1907 (U.S.A.), 1919 (London). First entitled *The Galilean's Victory*.
The Evangelist, 1907 (U.S.A.).
Dolly Reforming Herself, 1908.
The Knife, 1909.
We Can't Be as Bad as All That, 1910 (U.S.A.), 1916 (Croydon).
Fall in Rookies, 1910.
The Ogre, 1911.
Lydia Gilmore, 1912 (U.S.A.).
The Divine Gift, 1913.
Mary Goes First, 1913.
The Lie, 1914 (U.S.A.), 1923.
Cock o' the Walk, 1915 (U.S.A.).
The Pacifists, 1917.

McEvoy, Charles.
David Ballard, 1907.
His Helpmate, 1907.
When the Devil was Ill, 1908.
The Three Barrows, 1909.
Gentlemen of the Road, 1909.
The Village Wedding, 1910.
Lucifer, 1910.
All that Matters, 1911.
The Red Hen, 1912.
The Situation at Newbury, 1912.
Her Ladyship, 1918.
The Likes of Her, 1923.

Marshall, Robert (1863-1910).
His Excellency the Governor, 1898.
The Second in Command, 1900.
The Duke of Killiecrankie, 1904.

Martyn, Edward.
The Heather Field, 1899.
Maeve, 1900.
The Tale of a Town (1902), 1905. Revised by George Moore as *The Bending of the Bough*.
The Place Hunters, 1902.
An Enchanted Sea (1902), 1904.
Grangecolman, 1912.
The Dream Physician, 1914.
The Privilege of Place, 1915.

Masefield, John.
The Campden Wonder, 1907.
Mrs. Harrison, written 1906.
The Locked Chest, written 1906.
The Condemned Cell, ?
The Tragedy of Nan, 1908.
Pompey the Great, 1910.
The Witch (from the Norwegian of H. Wiers Jennsen), 1910.
Philip the King, 1914.
The Faithful, 1915.
The Sweeps of Ninety-Eight, 1916, written 1906.
Good Friday, 1917.
Esther (from Racine), 1921.
Berenice (from Racine), 1921.
Melloney Holtspur, 1923.
A King's Daughter, 1923.

Maugham, W. Somerset.
Schiffbrüchig, 1902. Written in German and produced in Germany.
A Man of Honour, 1903.
Lady Frederick, 1907.
Jack Straw, 1908.
Mrs. Dot, 1908.
The Explorer, 1908.
Penelope, 1909.
Smith, 1909.
The Tenth Man, 1910.

MAUGHAM, W. SOMERSET—*cont.*
Grace, 1910.
Loaves and Fishes, 1911.
A Trip to Brighton, 1911.
Landed Gentry, 1913.
The Land of Promise, 1914.
Caroline, 1916.
Our Betters, 1917 (U.S.A.), 1923.
Love in a Cottage, 1918.
Cæsar's Wife, 1919.
Home and Beauty, 1919.
The Unknown, 1920.
The Circle, 1921.
East of Suez, 1922.

MAYNE, RUTHERFORD.
The Turn of the Road, 1906.
The Drone, 1908.
The Troth, 1908.
The Gomeril, 1909.
The Captain of the Hosts, 1910.
Red Turf, 1911.
If !, 1915.

MILNE, A. A.
Wurzel-Flummery, 1917.
Belinda, 1918.
The Boy Comes Home, 1918.
Make-Believe, 1918.
The Camberley Triangle, 1919.
Mr. Pim Passes By, 1919.
The Romantic Age, 1920.
The Truth about Blayds, 1921.
The Dover Road, 1922.
The Great Broxopp, 1923.
Success, 1923.

MOFFAT, GRAHAM.
Till the Bells Ring, 1911.
Bunty Pulls the Strings, 1911.
A Scrape o' the Pen, 1912.

MONKHOUSE, ALLAN.
The Choice, 1910.
Mary Broome, 1911.
Resentment, 1912.
The Education of Mr. Surrage, 1912.
Nothing Like Leather, 1913.

MOORE, GEORGE.
The Strike at Arlingford, 1893.
The Bending of the Bough, 1900. A revision of E. Martyn, *The Tale of a Town*.
Diarmuid and Grania (with W. B. Yeats), 1901.
The Apostle (1911).

MUNRO, C. K.
Wanderers, 1915.
At Mrs. Beams, 1921.
The Rumour, 1922.

MURRAY, T. C.
The Wheel o' Fortune, 1909.
Birthright, 1910.
Maurice Harte, 1912.
Sovereign Love (revised version of *The Wheel o' Fortune*), 1913.
Spring, 1918.
The Briery Gap, 1918.
Aftermath, 1921.

PINERO, A. W.
Two Hundred a Year, 1877.
Two Can Play at That Game, 1877.
La Comète ; or, Two Hearts, 1878.
Daisy's Escape, 1879.
Hester's Mystery, 1880.
Bygones, 1880.
The Money-Spinner, 1880.
Imprudence, 1881.
The Squire, 1881.
Girls and Boys, 1882.
The Rector, 1883.
The Rocket, 1883.
Lords and Commons, 1883.
Low Water, 1884.
The Iron Master (from G. Ohnet, *Le Maître de Forges*), 1884.
In Chancery, 1884.
The Magistrate, 1885.
Mayfair (from V. Sardou, *La Maison Neuve*), 1885.
The Schoolmistress, 1886.
The Hobby Horse, 1886.
Dandy Dick, 1887.
Sweet Lavender, 1888.
The Weaker Sex, 1888.
The Profligate, 1889.
The Cabinet Minister, 1890.
Lady Bountiful, 1891.
The Times, 1891.
The Amazons, 1893.
The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, 1893.
The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith, 1895.
The Benefit of the Doubt, 1895.

The Princess and the Butterfly, 1897.
Trelawney of the "Wells," 1898.
The Beauty Stone (with J. Comyns Carr), 1898. Comic opera, music by Sir A. Sullivan.
The Gay Lord Quex, 1899.
Iris, 1901.
Letty, 1903.
A Wife Without a Smile, 1904.
His House in Order, 1906.
The Thunderbolt, 1908.
Mid-Channel, 1909.
Preserving Mr. Panmure, 1911.
The Mind the Paint Girl, 1912.
The Widow of Wasdale Head, 1912.
Playgoers, 1913.
The Big Drum, 1915.
Mr. Livermore's Dream, 1917.
The Freaks, 1918.
Monica's Blue Boy, 1918. Wordless play, music by Sir F. Cowen.
Quick Work, 1919 (U.S.A.).
The Enchanted Cottage, 1922.

ROBERTSON, T. W. (1829-1871).
David Garrick, 1864.
Society, 1865.
Ours, 1866.
Caste, 1867.
Play, 1868.
Home, 1869.
School, 1869.
Dreams, 1869.
Breach of Promise, 1869.
Progress, 1869.
Nightingale, 1870.
M.P., 1870.
Birth, 1870.
War, 1871.
A Row in the House, 1883.

ROBINSON, S. L.
The Clancy Name, 1908. Revised version, 1909.
The Cross Roads, 1909.
Harvest, 1910.
Patriots, 1912.
The Dreamers, 1915.
The Whiteheaded Boy, 1916.
The Lost Leader, 1918.
The Round Table, 1922.
Crabbed Youth and Age, 1922.

ROWLEY, ANTHONY.
A Weaver's Shuttle, 1910.
The Probationer, 1911.

SHAW, GEORGE BERNARD.
This list is arranged according to the order of composition, but the dates have the significance explained on page 306.
Widowers' Houses, 1892.
The Philanderer, (1898), 1905.
Mrs. Warren's Profession, (1898), 1902.
Arms and the Man, 1894.
Candida, 1895.
The Man of Destiny, 1897.
You Never Can Tell (1898), 1900.
The Devil's Disciple, 1897.
Cæsar and Cleopatra, 1899.
Captain Brassbound's Conversion (1900), 1902.
The Admirable Bashville, 1901.
Man and Superman (1903), 1905.
John Bull's Other Island, 1904.
How He Lied to Her Husband, 1904.
Major Barbara, 1905.
Passion, Poison and Petrifaction, or the Fatal Gayogene, 1905.
The Doctor's Dilemma, 1906.
Getting Married, 1908.
Press Cuttings, 1909.
The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet, 1909.
The Dark Lady of the Sonnets, 1910.
Misalliance, 1910.
Fanny's First Play, 1911.
Overruled, 1912.
Androcles and the Lion, 1913.
Pygmalion, 1913.
Great Catherine, 1913.
The Music Cure, 1914.
O'Flaherty V.C. 1920.
The Inca of Perusalem, 1917.
Augustus Does His Bit, 1917.
Annajanska, the Bolshevik Empress, 1918.

SHAW, GEORGE BERNARD—*cont.*
Heartbreak House (1919), 1920 (U.S.A.), 1921 (London).
Back to Methusaleh (1921), 1922 (U.S.A.), 1923 (Birmingham).
Jitta's Atonement (translation of S. Trebitsch, *Frau Gittas Sühne*), 1923 (U.S.A.).
Saint Joan, 1923 (U.S.A.).

SOWERBY, K. GITHA (Mrs. John Kendall.)
Rutherford and Son, 1912.
Before Breakfast, 1912.
Jinny, 1914.
Man and Some Women, 1914.
Sheila, 1917.

SUTRO, ALFRED.
A Marriage Has Been Arranged, 1902.
The Walls of Jericho, 1904.
A Maker of Men, 1905.
Mollentrave on Women, 1905.
The Perfect Lover, 1905.
The Fascinating Mr. Vanderveldt, 1906.
John Glayde's Honour, 1907.
The Barrier, 1907.
The Builder of Bridges, 1908.
Making a Gentleman, 1909.
The Perplexed Husband, 1911.
The Fire Screen, 1912.
The Bracelet, 1912.
The Two Virtues, 1914.
The Clever Ones, 1914.
The Two Miss Farndons, 1917.
The Marriage Will Not Take Place, 1917.
The Trap, 1918.
Uncle Anyhow (originally entitled *The Two Miss Farndons*), 1918.
The Choice, 1919.
The Great Well, 1922.
The Laughing Lady, 1922.

SYNGE, J. M. (1871-1909).
In the Shadow of the Glen, 1903.
Riders to the Sea, 1904.
The Well of the Saints, 1905.
The Playboy of the Western World, 1907.
The Tinker's Wedding, 1909.
Deirdre of the Sorrows, 1910.

WILDE, OSCAR O'F. W. (1856-1900.)
Vera ; or, The Nihilists, (1880), 1883 (U.S.A.).
The Duchess of Padua (1883), 1891 (U.S.A.).
Salomé, rehearsed 1892, London, but performance banned.
(*a*) French version (1893), 1896 (Paris).
(*b*) English version (1894), 1905 (London).
Lady Windermere's Fan, 1892.
A Woman of No Importance, 1893.
An Ideal Husband, 1895.
The Importance of Being Earnest, 1895.
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